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FX MASTER DENNIS MUREN

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THE MAW OF DESTRUCTION: It's been a long, bloody trek from the original *Alien* to the upcoming *Alien 4*



Courtesy of the Center for the Arts at Yerba Buena Gardens, CA

Alexis Rockman uses *Star Wars*' Bakla tank as an element in his painting *Biosphere Laboratory*

After taking a snootful of teasing following a private screening of his then-unfinished *Star Wars*, George Lucas began to downgrade his expectations for the fantasy-adventure epic. Shortly before the movie opened in May of 1977, he predicted it would only gross about \$16 million. The releasing studio, Twentieth Century Fox, feared he might be right.

But the swashbuckling space flick surprised both the 33-year-old filmmaker and the studio: Week after week the movie set box-office records—finally topping \$500 million, the most successful film ever at that time.

And that was just the beginning. For the past 17 years, *Star Wars* has served as the queen bee for an ever-expanding hive of products and creations. The movie and its characters have become a part of Americana—"the significant residue of a civilization," as Lucas has said. *Star Wars* also changed the way movies were made and marketed—and though he has revealed in the new technology and become rich from the blockbuster mentality, he has often regretted that change.

As a film student at the University of Southern California in the 1960s, Lucas positioned himself for a low-key career as a documentary and experimental filmmaker. His first feature, 1971's *THX 1138*, clearly fell into the latter category. A few years later, he began writing an adventure story for children, an outer-space movie that would entertain as well as subtly teach traditional moral lessons. The movie, coming

on the heels of his highly successful *American Graffiti*, threw him into profit-making overdrive. And with this mammoth success, the director suddenly found previously laudatory critics directing their darts at him. *Star Wars* lacked thematic weight, some said; *The New Yorker's* Pauline Kael even accused him of making pictures that were nothing more than commercial pap.

Whether or not his critics have valid points, there's no denying that *Star Wars* inspired feelings of awe and wonderment in both moviegoers and his fellow filmmakers—no small accomplishment. Even the unassuming Lucas now saw his future writ large. Recalling his college days with nostalgia, he wanted to re-create for professionals the atmosphere of camaraderie and creativity that he remembered from film school. So he built Skywalker Ranch, a vast film production complex and think tank in Northern California that has become the industry leader in advanced technology.

That done, he has now turned his attention to improving the country's educational system, using interactive media and old-fashioned entertainment values to engage young minds. But big-screen fans needn't worry that Lucas might abandon the multiplexes. With his continued interest in his *Star Wars* saga and the Indiana Jones film franchise, he is likely to remain a box-office champ for years. His ambition to become a low-budget, avant-garde filmmaker continues to be frustrated by his uncanny knack for success.

—Douglas Perry
Managing Editor

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Star Power

I read that Kenneth Branagh was considered for the role of Obi-Wan Kenobi in the new *Star Wars* trilogy, but will not get it. I'd like to know why.

You probably wouldn't agree, but I think Michael Biehn from *The Terminator*, *Aliens* and *The Abyss* would be a good Anakin Skywalker.

BRENT ROBINSON
ELLIJAY, GA

The scripts for the new *Star Wars* trilogy (Frankenstein's scripter Frank Darabont is working with George Lucas) are still in the early

stages, and Lucasfilm says that no casting decisions have been made. —Ed.

Deep Space Fan

I am writing in response to R. John Burke's letter in November's CINESCAPE, "DS9 Distress Signal." DS9 did get a slow start, but the third season has proven it to be particularly excellent television. For the first two years I watched it because it was *Star Trek*—recalling *The Next Generation*'s bumpy first two seasons. Now I watch it because I love it!

Mr. Burke speaks of a "bum rap" given the show by many viewers.

Another stunning show, criticized heavily even before its debut, has suffered this phenom-

enon far worse: *Babylon 5*. From its very first episode, *Babylon 5* has been a constant treat. I implore all science-fiction fans out there to give the show a chance. Watch it once—you'll be hooked! *Babylon 5* is not only good science fiction with spectacular special effects, but it is also heartwarming and funny. It shows, I feel, a more likely future than any of the *Star Trek* installments—and while not as whimsically optimistic as *Star Trek*, it certainly is no cause for despair. Though *Babylon 5* was originally scoffed at for having too similar a premise to *Deep Space Nine* (DS9, being *Star Trek*, immediately had the upper hand), the two shows really have little in common, aside from both being quality entertainment. And of course, it goes without saying that I would love to see both *Babylon 5* and *Deep Space 9* covered in your wonderful magazine.

SARA JOHNS
ALBANY, CA

On a Crusade

I was in a bookstore, bored out of my mind and suffering from the stresses of school and looking at mediocre movie mags, when out of the corner of my eye I saw a brand-new movie magazine, CINESCAPE. I picked it up and started to turn the pages.

I was intrigued by the massive detail and explanations of each movie that was coming out in the future. It was like traveling in a time machine into the future of movies and their actors. What really caught my eye were the articles in your November and December issues called "Arnold's \$100 million *Crusade*" and "Schwarzenegger's *Quest*."

I think it would be great to see Arnold do an epic movie on the Crusades pitting the Moslems against the Christians. This idea will show the medieval castles, masques, armor, clothing, culture and especially, the true life stories of the kings, sultans and warriors who fought in the Crusades. The actors in this extravaganza should be of European and Middle Eastern descent, to make the movie more convincing about the true historical events. This idea would cause no controversy because neither side, Christian or Moslem, won this memorable war outright.

The actors that are perfect for this movie would be Arnold Schwarzenegger, of course, and Jean-Claude Van Damme, who is establishing himself as a great actor and who speaks French.

Arnold should also bring back legendary actors to the silver screen like Omar Sharif as an Arab sultan or even Patrick Stewart and Sean Connery as English kings. These actors would make this movie clean up in the Oscars and they would etch a great epic adventure in our minds much like the Crusades did hundreds of years ago.

ZERGHAM TAREEN
TORONTO, ONTARIO

Suggestion Box

I enjoy reading CINESCAPE very much and I look forward to every new issue. I would like, however, to make a suggestion if I may: how about features on older TV shows, like *UFO*, *Space 1999*, *Lost in Space*, etc. *The X-Files* is one of the best



Ralph McQuarrie's original sketch of Han Solo had more than a passing resemblance to the character's creator

shows of all time, and the *Star Trek* series are fine, but you can't really have a feature on them in every issue!

Anyway, it was just a thought. And thanks for exploring the darker areas of fantasy, like the Clive Barker movies and *In the Mouth of Madness*. If CINESCAPE continues to delve into all areas of the fantastic, it'll be like no other publication around. Keep it up!

NICOLAS LACROIX
QUEBEC, CANADA

Though we concentrate on TV shows in production, from The X-Files to TekWar, we do not plan to ignore classic science fiction. With a Lost in Space movie in development, that '60s series is especially likely to enjoy a revival in popularity. —Ed.

I love *Star Trek*. I grew up watching the original, lamented the cancellation of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and am one of the few die-hard fans of *Deep Space Nine*. But enough is enough! All your magazine seems to cover lately is *Trek* in all its various incarnations. How about *Babylon 5*? How about *Batman Forever*? How about any of the other sci-fi projects in the works right now that aren't *Star Trek*? I realize that *Trek* is timely because of the *Generations* movie and the debut of *Voyager*. But please, give us some variety—isn't anything else newsworthy?

SUSAN ARENDT
NEWTOWN SQUARE, PA

Star Trek has indeed been a timely subject with the appearance of Star Trek: Generations on the big screen and Star Trek: Voyager on the new Paramount network. But we still managed to squeeze in features on Babylon 5 (Vol. 1, No. 2) and Batman Forever (Vol. 1, No. 1 and Vol. 1, No. 5) and will continue to do so. There is much that is newsworthy coming out of Hollywood, as you will see in the pages ahead. —Ed.

Trekspectations

I am very disappointed in the latest *Star Trek* movie. I think it was shameful that Leonard Nimoy could not have a part in the film. It is also sad that Spock wasn't talked about when Picard and Kirk were in the Nexus. It is also sad that Kirk actually had to die and not just disappear into the Nexus. I also thought that Riker should have had a bigger part. The music was very lame, almost like a cross between *Wild, Wild West* and *Voltron*. Come on, guys, if you're going to make lots of *Star Trek* shows and movies, use *The Next Generation's* theme song. And don't expect *Voyager* to be good, unless they add one or two of the TNG cast as regulars. I also thought Thomas Riker joining the Maquis was stupid. The Defiant, the Dominion and the Jem Hadar are lame attempts to get us to like DS9. Get a clue, Paramount! When you killed *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, you stabbed at our hearts, and *Voyager*, DS9 or even *Generations* flicks will not heal our wounds. Maybe you should try developing the Vulcan-Romulan reunification, or even bring back the Borg. But I doubt that you could make things much better. I'll just have to wait until January to see if *Voyager* is going to suck or not. It better be good, or I will lose all faith in *Star Trek*.

RONALD CHAPMAN
74221,2210

I have read your recent articles on *Star Trek* with great interest. While many of the recent letters on *Star Trek: Voyager* have expressed the hope that *Voyager* would be realistic and finally abandon the Pollyannaish "I love you, you love me" attitude of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, I feel that that expectation is very unrealistic. The same producers that reduced the Borg to nothing more than schoolyard bullies

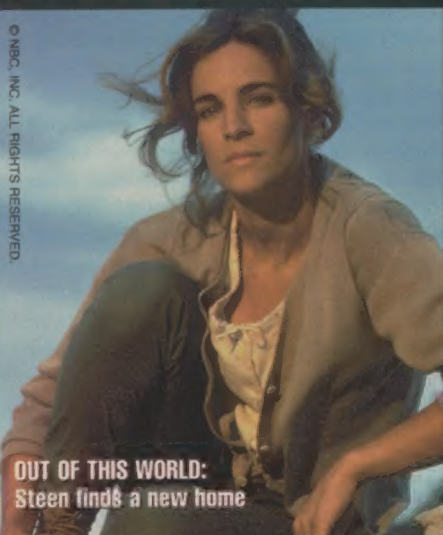
MEDICAL ADVANCES

Jessica Steen checks *Earth 2's* pulse as super-smart medicine woman Julia Heller

For actress Jessica Steen, the unexamined role isn't worth playing. So she doesn't hesitate to turn the stethoscope on her latest character—the genetically enhanced physician Julia Heller on NBC's *Earth 2*. "Dr. Heller has an instinctual thirst for knowledge, but because of her genetic make-up, she gets a lot of flak," says the 29-year-old, last seen as the gutsy union organizer Linda Metcalf on ABC's short-lived period drama *Homefront*. "She's driven to

prove herself beyond that unfair advantage, so she keeps her nose to the grindstone."

Steen could say the same of herself. A native of Toronto, she was cast in a Canadian TV program for kids at age eight and has been working almost nonstop since in episodic television (*Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Wiseguy*) and feature films (including the



OUT OF THIS WORLD:
Steen finds a new home

1989 musical *Sing*) on both sides of the border. It was the theme of ecological catastrophe that attracted Steen—an environmentalist—to *Earth 2*.

"Generally, I get disappointed with the way things are going environmentally," she says. "So I have no trouble picturing the planet Earth in the condition that *Earth 2* describes 200 years from now—gray, bleak, dead—and accepting that we may some day have to abandon it. But the show offers a glimmer of hope by allowing us to begin anew in a pristine place."

Though she freely admits that she isn't a dyed-in-the-lyra sci-fi buff, Steen is no stranger to the genre: She starred as a techno-whiz pilot in the 1987 syndicated series *Captain Power*. Since landing on *Earth 2*, however, she finds herself tuning in to other science-fiction shows. "Because I play a futuristic doctor, my dialogue contains a lot of technical jargon that's difficult to do justice to. I like to see how other shows pull it off."

Steen also likes to observe how other science-fiction programs handle social issues. "When we're talking about the future, I think we're hoping that there aren't sexual and racial discrimination elements in society at that point," she says. "We're hoping that we'll be beyond all that."

Yet even Steen isn't beyond aiming a barb at a rival series' rather gender-specific garb. "If I had to slip into one of those *Star Trek* outfits ... well, they certainly do define what sex you are!" She chuckles, adding with some relief: "I'm glad we don't have those suits." —Dean Lamanna

are not likely to produce any show that's not talky, preachy or politically correct.

Just look at the casting of *Star Trek: Voyager*. Rick Berman was so hell-bent on casting a woman as captain that he gave Genevieve Bujold the role without even an audition! We all know how that turned out. Winrich Kolbe directly states that "we wanted a young Asian male" in the cast! Setting a de facto quota system up in casting a TV series is ridiculous! I hate to sound sexist, but the single largest group of *Star Trek* fans are young, single males. Many of these viewers like the captain to be someone that they would like to be. Regardless of how competent Captain Janeway is, regardless of how great an actress Kate Mulgrew is, I'll bet that many male viewers will watch *Star Trek: Voyager* and find few characters to identify with. This isn't sexism or racism. It's simply a fact.

Deciding to separate *Star Trek: Voyager* from all of the familiar elements in *Star Trek* seems like a major error as well. Elements such as the Romulans, Klingons, Star Fleet command, other starships, the Borg, etc., are all the things that give *Star Trek* its structure. I also don't believe many fans will enjoy seeing the crew of *Voyager* stumble from planet to planet, meeting aliens with bumpy foreheads and acting like it's the first time it's happened.

After corresponding with many fans, I firmly believe that the next *Star Trek* series should take place aboard the *Enterprise B*, roughly halfway between the time of the original series and *ST:TNG*. A series set in this time period could be a vital link between the original series and the three *Star Trek* series taking place a century later. This series, with the production values of *TNG* and the action and adventure of the original series, would capture the imagination of *Star Trek* fans like nothing has since the premiere of *TNG*.

In regard to the next *Star Trek* movie, I agree with the article last fall in *CINESCAPE*

in which the author strongly suggests that the Borg be the focus of the story. No adversary, whether it be Klingon, mad scientist or spacial anomaly could match the ominous feeling one would get seeing a giant Borg cube ship slowly filling the screen! I also hope that the next movie focuses on action and not character development. After seven years of *ST:TNG*, I've seen all the character development I care to see.

I think that Rick Berman and Michael Piller are compromising the long-term future of *Star Trek*. Does anyone really believe that in 10 years, *Trek* fans will be eagerly awaiting a movie version of *Deep Space Nine*? And after *Voyager* finally gets home, will there be any story left to tell? Producing two consecutive, expensive series with zero potential of becoming successful movie franchises can't make Paramount very happy in the long run. I think someone such as Ron Moore, who is action-oriented and has a greater affinity for the original *Star Trek* series, should be put in charge of developing future *Trek* series.

DAYTON KITCHENS
DIERKS, AR

Sulu warps ahead?

I just picked up your *Star Trek: Voyager* issue and I must say the article was well done. I also enjoyed your articles on *Star Trek: Generations* and your interview with Malcolm McDowell.

Speaking of *Star Trek*, I just heard through the fan grapevine that George Takei is campaigning for a new *Star Trek* television series involving Captain Hikaru Sulu and the crew of the *Excelsior*. From what I've heard, many *Star Trek* fans have been writing to Paramount voicing their support for more Sulu adventures. After the success of the Sulu adventures released by Simon and Schuster audio, I can understand why.

CHRISTOPHER BROCK
GEORGETOWN, IN

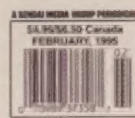
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The latest from the set of the next Bat-movie

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OTHER FILMS IS REMAKING MOVIE HISTORY**



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- **GOLDENEYE:** Can Pierce Brosnan save 007 from oblivion?
- Kevin Costner's **WATERWORLD** floats into post-production
- John Carpenter pays another visit to **THE VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED**

X-File update

I recently picked up the January issue of *CINESCAPE*. The magazine greatly impressed me with its diversity of topics and in-depth coverage of movies and television.

However, I was heartbroken when I saw that the November issue was devoted to *The X-Files*. I love this show and am a huge and very loyal fan. I constantly keep up with media coverage, and still am trying to figure out how I missed this issue. I am very eager to pick up that issue, since it is the first time I've seen such a significant amount of information published on the show. I would like to find out more about the actors, Duchovny and Anderson, who do a great job of portraying Mulder and Scully.

I disagree with a letter published in the January issue, which said that a romance between the characters should be averted. I myself have been waiting ever since last season for

this to happen; it would be a great idea. I support Mulder in his beliefs, as I have always been a believer in the supernatural and the paranormal.

I would really like to get a copy of *The X-Files* issue, and would like to know how I could get my hands on it.

MATT CARN
MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO

CINESCAPE has received many letters requesting copies of the November 1994 issue.

Unfortunately, that issue is now sold out, and there are no plans to print additional copies. We apologize to all the X-Philes out there. —Ed.

CINESCAPE welcomes letters. Please address them to:
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LATE-BREAKING NEWS ON MOVIES, TELEVISION & MORE

Cutthroat Competition

Will Geena Davis' buccaneer buddy flick walk the plank?

It must be something in the water.

Cutthroat Island, the Geena Davis pirate flick now filming in the Mediterranean, is only the latest in a long line of big-budget films to founder on the high seas.

Although the troubled Carolco Pictures has staked its survival on it, the \$70 million feature may join such sunken epics as *Pirates* and *The Island* at Davey Jones' watery box office.

Though the willowy Davis in a pirate epic is far from a sure-thing attraction, Carolco sold off or abandoned a series of high-profile projects—including the Schwarzenegger medieval actioner *Crusade*—to fund the project. Yet because the independent studio has had a tough time getting its financial dinghy in order, funding was not finalized until two months after filming began on the island of Malta.

Now, desperate for a big hit, the studio is praying that audiences will flood theaters to see Geena Davis as Morgan Adams, a hard-drinking pirate captain in search of (what else?) buried treasure. Joining her on the high-seas search is ... Mel Gibson? Tom Cruise? Sorry, ladies, it's Matthew Modine, the average-guy star of *Full Metal Jacket* and *Vision Quest*.

As unlikely couple as they are, Davis and Modine will need to throw off some impressive sparks, because the film



STAND AND DELIVER: Davis and Modine on location in Malta

needs to gross more than \$100 million at the box office before Carolco sees its bank account grow. And considering that Davis' last vehicle, the low-key comedy *Angie*, sank like a stone, Carolco is crossing its fingers that Davis can still bring in *Thelma and Louise*-sized raves and cash receipts.

At the moment, however, the studio is just happy that the movie is going to make it to theaters. After Carolco report-

edly had already poured a river of cash into preproduction, the project nearly capsized last summer when Michael Douglas backed out of the lead role of Shaw. To keep Davis and her husband, director Renny Harlin, on board, the studio quickly enlisted Modine (after Charlie Sheen reportedly turned down the role) to play the smooth-talking rogue who alternately cheats and charms Adams during the pirate crew's

adventures in the Caribbean.

Playing the hard-drinking pirate captain is certainly a change of pace for Davis, who's best known for her more cuddly roles, like the quirky dog trainer in *The Accidental Tourist*, a role that won her an Academy Award. Most recently, she appeared opposite Michael Keaton in the sappy political comedy, *Speechless*.

Cutthroat Island offers no pretense at originality, instead



ROOM FOR THE CREW: Boatloads of buccaneers on *Cutthroat Island*

hoping to lure an audience through Davis' girl-next-door appeal and a plethora of exciting action scenes. The movie opens with the oft-soused Adams receiving one-third of a pirate map and command of the good ship *Morning Star* from her dying dad. "I'm giving it to you," Harry Adams tells his daughter with his last breath. "I always knew you'd only grow up at the barrel of a pistol. Well, dammit, here's your big chance!"

Pursued by the dastardly Dawg, Adams' piratical nemesis, the *Morning Star* and her crew encounter thrills and adventure as they endeavor to unite the pieces of the map that will lead them to a treasure chest full of Spanish gold. Slowly and surely, Adams wins

the respect of her crew by evading His Majesty's forces and outwitting Dawg and company in the search for the buried loot, while still finding time for a refreshing rum-and-gunpowder raid along the way. "Like mother's milk," the pirateess tells Shaw, smacking her lips after a drinking session at a Jamaican tavern, a scene that inevitably evolves into the kind of drunken brawl found in all pirate pics.

Whether action-thirsty moviegoers will find *Cutthroat Island* as refreshing as Adams finds her explosive cocktail remains to be seen. But doom-sayers note that the last sailor yarn to be shot on Malta, 1980's *Popeye*, was yet another big-budget—and star-studded—water bomb. ♦

Glover feels *Flame's* heat

Though the novel *White Flame* hasn't found a publisher, it quickly became one of the hottest properties in Hollywood during last fall's political season.

The action-packed thriller follows the campaign of a black civil rights worker-turned-billionaire who runs for president. With *Lethal Weapon* star Danny Glover interested in the lead role, the film

rights to the manuscript sold for more than \$1 million after only one day on the market. All that remains to move the film into production is the casting of the role of the white secret service agent charged with protecting the candidate.

James Grady, author of *White Flame*, is best known for the early '70s Robert Redford adventure film *Three Days of the Condor*, which was based on his novel.

The deal for Grady's novel follows hot on the heels of the \$3 million Hollywood dropped for another unpublished book, Nicholas Evans' *The Horse Whisperer*—which hasn't even been completed.

Glover hasn't had a major blockbuster since the *Lethal Weapon* series, appearing instead in small dramas. But with *White Flame*, he shows he's ready once again to turn up the heat. ♦



FLAME GAME: Glover's capital adventure

RIPLEY: BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Joss Whedon, *Alien 4*'s scriptwriter, thought long and hard about how to bring back Ripley, the gritty heroine of the *Alien* series.

Ripley reportedly wasn't even in the first treatment for the third sequel, but then Twentieth Century Fox decided it wanted Sigourney Weaver after all, so Whedon began to revive the character, who was killed at the close of *Alien 3*.

As preproduction geared up on the sequel, rumors spread about how Ripley would return. Most prevalent of these was that she would appear thanks to a *Dallas*-style reincarnation—making Ripley's fiery death at the end of *Alien 3* a dream. After rejecting that idea, Whedon came up with the idea of cloning the indomitable Ripley, a process he says won't be pretty.

Although Sigourney Weaver hasn't signed on the dotted line, she's expected to come aboard once the final script meets her approval. The actress, who just completed work on the thriller *Copycat* and appeared in last winter's *Death and the Maiden*, said in a recent interview that she doesn't buy the conventional wisdom that only women have to struggle to find good roles. "I don't think there are many good roles out there for men either. I think good roles are hard to find in general," the actress said. For more on the latest *Alien* project, see *CINESCAPE*'s exclusive interview with Joss Whedon on page 18.



DREAM WEAVER
The cloned ranger rides again

CRUISE'S IMPOSSIBLE CO-STAR

Unless you're a devotee of current French cinema, you're probably not familiar with Emmanuelle Beart, the actress who landed a plum role opposite Tom Cruise in the big-screen version of *Mission: Impossible*. Beart will play the female lead in the flick, which follows a crack team of specialized government agents who use high-tech gadgetry to save America from terrorist attacks.

Known to the art-house crowd for her work in films like *Manon of the Spring*, Beart's only American release is 1987's forgettable romantic comedy *Date with an Angel*, in which she supplied divine intervention to a downeast bridegroom-to-be on the night of his bachelor party.

Those wishing to get a longer look at the 29-year-old Beart can check out 1991's critically acclaimed *La Belle Noiseuse*. In her role as the model who reenergizes an artist after a 10-year creative drought, Beart spends much of the four-hour film posing in the altogether.

Other actors up for roles in the Brian De Palma-directed adaptation of the TV show include *The Professional*'s Jean Reno and Ving Rhames, best known for his role as Marsellus Wallace in *Pulp Fiction*.



FRENCH CONNECTION
Beart's under Cruise control

STAR WARS ERUPT IN ART WORLD

If George Lucas has any lingering doubts about the public's hunger for anything related to *Star Wars*, he should take a break from preparing the new trilogy and check out the lines at a San Francisco museum near his Skywalker Ranch.

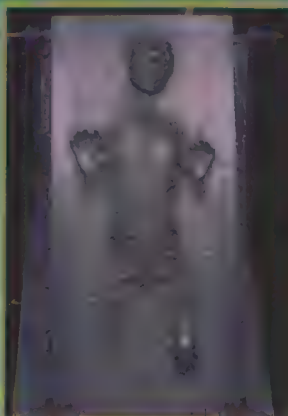
The Yerba Buena Gardens Center for the Arts expected about a thousand people a day to take in its exhibit *The Art of Star Wars*. But since the show's opening on Dec. 27, more than 2,000 people have stormed the galleries on most days, according to museum spokesman David Perry. "It's fun to see people who lined up to see the movie as kids coming here with their own kids," Perry says.

The exhibit showcases more than 400 models, paintings and other objects that were used in the production of the three films, including Han Solo's carbonite freezer, a miniature Death Star and Darth Vader's robes.

"George is a very quiet, reserved gentleman, but he saw doing this show as an opportunity for the artists involved in *Star Wars* to really shine," Perry says. The normally publicity-shy filmmaker even went so far as to give a speech at a fund-raiser for the center, accompanied by none other than Darth Vader himself. According to Perry, Lord Vader managed to resist the Dark Side of the Force on that occasion long enough to say a few kind words about the museum.

The altruistic Lucas is clearly sincere in his support of the center, but the filmmaker was also likely motivated by a desire to increase the visibility of the movie franchise as he prepares his new *Star Wars* films. After all, there's a whole generation of moviegoers who are unfamiliar with the Beatlemania-like hysteria that accompanied the pioneering sci-fi flicks, and impressive exhibits like this one will serve to whet the appetite of even the smallest filmgoing fry.

After the San Francisco exhibit closes on March 12, a smaller version will open at Washington D.C.'s Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in 1997. The show isn't scheduled to travel to any other cities, but Perry says: "Who knows what the Force will bring about?"



SOLO ON ICE
Han gets the deep freeze



ARTIST'S CONCEPTION
The Millennium Falcon inside the Death Star

Sutherland on his Way

It's only fitting that Kiefer Sutherland, Hollywood royalty, should star in the upcoming adventure flick *The Royal Way*.

Sutherland (son of acting blue blood Donald) will play Jack, an American archeology student in the 1920s who is searching for a lost temple in the jungles of Southeast Asia. He soon gets mixed up in a conflict between the colonial French Army and Richard Harris, a Westerner who's become chief of one of the local tribes.

The Royal Way, based on an autobiographical novel by French writer Andre Malraux, marks a return to high-profile fare for Sutherland, who's recent releases include the less-than-thrilling thriller *The Vanishing* and the buddy action-comedy *The Cowboy Way*, which co-starred Woody Harrelson.

Before he became notorious for being Julia Roberts' most infamous dumpee, Sutherland had actually built a solid career for himself on the basis of such flicks as 1986's *Stand By Me* and *The Lost*



ROYAL TREATMENT:
Sutherland's way

Boys, which followed a year later. Perhaps *The Royal Way* will help crown Sutherland king of the young male actors once more.

Richard Harris, Sutherland's co-star, needs no such validation from fickle Hollywood. The Irish actor's 30-year career includes everything from the four-star war pic *The Guns of Navarone* and the medieval fantasy *Camelot* to recent top-notch fare like *Unforgiven* and *Patriot Games*. ♦

The Net snares Miller

Dennis Miller, the smart-aleck former host of *Saturday Night Live's* Weekend Update and his own late-night talk show, is the latest actor to get caught up in *The Net*, a high-tech thriller starring *Speed's* Sandra Bullock.

In the film, which started production in January, Bullock plays a computer junkie who stumbles across a secret government computer program, a discovery that endangers her life.

Miller, who appeared in *Disclosure* after the cancelation of his short-lived talk show, will play Bullock's former boyfriend, a psychiatrist. Jeremy Northam, an award-winning British stage actor, will play the villain who tries to kill Bullock after her accidental discovery. That role had been linked to actor Kyle MacLachlan, star of last year's UFO pic *Roswell*.

Bullock, who admits to being computer-illiterate, recently shot footage for *The Net* on location at San Francisco's MacWorld Expo. ♦



WEAVING THE NET:
Bullock gets up to speed

Cashin' Carrey cracks top tier

Jim Carrey, whose yukfest *Dumb and Dumber* cemented his dizzying ascent to the top of Hollywood's pecking order, will soon be getting anywhere from \$12 million to \$18 million per picture, according to the Hollywood grapevine.

Carrey made less than \$500,000 for his first starring role in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, but after the success of both that film and *The Mask*, his salary climbed to \$7 million for *Dumb*. Any doubts about whether that salary was deserved were put to rest by the new comedy's opening weekend, when the film grossed more than its entire budget.

Now the former stand-up comic has the luxury of turning down enormous salaries that top those of other established stars. According to *Daily Variety*, Carrey said no thanks to an \$18 million paycheck for *The Thief of Santa Monica*, a film about a boy who befriends a genie, reportedly due to creative problems with the producers. That amazing fee vaunts Carrey past the likes of Oscar-winner Michael Douglas, who got \$10 million for *Disclosure*, and puts the rubber-faced comic in almost the same league as action veteran Sylvester Stallone, who recently broke a new Hollywood salary barrier with a deal that will pay him \$20 million for a single picture.

Sly signed that unprecedented pact with Savoy Pictures, an upstart independent production company that's trying to establish itself as one of Hollywood's major players. The impact of all those zeroes at the end of Stallone's paycheck



RICH AND RICHER:
Carrey cashes in

may be lessened somewhat by the fact that Sly's as-yet-undetermined vehicle won't even go into production for a year, but the eyebrow-raising deal has set a new standard for A-level talent. "This will have a ripple effect on the highest level, because now agents will feel a need to go after this figure for their big clients," Disney chairman Joe Roth told *The Los Angeles Times*.

Some say that Savoy, whose \$7 million offer failed to lure Keanu Reeves to the actioner *Without Remorse*, is spending big in a desperate effort to buy credibility after flops like *Exit to Eden* and *Serial Mom*.

Time will tell if either Stallone or Carrey is worth those eye-popping payouts. But in any case, Hollywood's studio executives had better start ordering oversized checkbooks. ♦

Hunter on the prowl again

Fred Dryer, star of the popular 1980s series *Hunter*, will be returning to the small screen with a syndicated show called *Land's End*. Set in the Mexican resort community of Cabo San Lucas, Dryer will play private detective Mike Land.

With shows like *RoboCop: The Series* and *Thunder in Paradise* biting the dust due to low ratings, the syndication market has fallen on hard times of late. But Walt Disney Television, the company that's developing *Land's End*, feels it has a proven performer with Dryer.

"Not only did Fred Dryer propel *Hunter* to number one in its time slot for seven seasons on network [TV], the show went on to be the number one hour-long, off-network drama during its last three seasons," Disney executive Mort Maren told *The Hollywood Reporter*.

When *Land's End* hits the small screen this fall, Dryer will have competition from Bryan Brown, the hunky Australian star of FX, who's set to star in *The Wanderers*, a sci-fi drama about reincarnated twins—one good and one evil.



ON THE HUNT:
Dryer finds Land

VOYAGER'S VICTORY

Like its Starfleet predecessors, *Star Trek: Voyager* had an impressive launch, more than tripling the ratings that its

stations have averaged in recent weeks. The two-hour premiere won its time slot for the fledgling United Paramount Network, coming close to the stratospheric

numbers posted by *The Next Generation* in 1987 and *Deep Space Nine* two years ago, both of which had wider initial exposure and less direct competition.



Nielsen Rating

14.7

**STAR TREK:
VOYAGER
1995**

17.5

**STAR TREK:
DEEP SPACE NINE
1993**

17.7

**STAR TREK:
THE NEXT GENERATION
1987**

Source: The Hollywood Reporter

BOX-OFFICE BONANZA

A cuddly kid's flick and a film about a warm-hearted simpleton may have topped the box office in 1994, but most of the year's top-ten list belonged to action/adventure and fantasy flicks. Simba may be king, but Schwarzenegger and Carrey *really* ruled last year.

1		The Lion King \$300.4 Million Buena Vista
2		Forrest Gump \$298.5 Million Paramount
3		True Lies \$146.3 Million Twentieth Century Fox
4		The Santa Clause \$137.8 Million Buena Vista
5		The Flintstones \$130.6 Million Universal
6		Clear and Present Danger \$121.8 Million Paramount
7		Speed \$121.3 Million Twentieth Century Fox
8		The Mask \$118.8 Million New Line
9		Maverick \$101.6 Million Warner Bros.
10		Interview With The Vampire \$100.7 Million Warner Bros.

Good karma for Gibson

Now that Hollywood has discovered William Gibson, the father of cyberpunk, Hollywood execs are falling all over themselves to snatch up cyberbooks from him and others. Gibson garnered more than \$1 million for the book, film and CD-ROM rights to his latest manuscript, *The Zen Differential*.

Details on the project's plot were not available at press time, but Atlas Entertainment executive Kathryn Sommer told *The Hollywood Reporter* that *Zen* is going to be "a big, futuristic action movie."

A Tibetan Buddhist master is another cyberZen denizen in Alexander Beshar's *Rim: A Novel of Virtual Reality*, the film and game rights to which were recently snapped up by TriStar Pictures.

First serialized on the Internet's World Wide Web, *Rim* follows the efforts of a "consciousness detective" and his Tibetan sidekick, who rescue cybersurfers trapped in virtual reality by a global computer crash.

Rim's author logged many years as a journalist covering high-tech industries. ♦

Reeves livens up *Dead Drop*

Megahot Keanu Reeves recently inked a deal to star in *Dead Drop*, an action thriller set to begin production this fall. Reeves will play a scientist who goes on the lam when he finds

out that the government plans to use his high-tech inventions for evil purposes.

Reeves is also committed to do the as-yet-unwritten *Speed* sequel. ♦

Indy's new temple of zoom

Looks like you'll have to change your vacation plans if your destination isn't Disneyland. The Anaheim, CA, amusement park recently opened its Indiana Jones ride, which has three different paths so that thrillseekers have a variety of ways to test their nerves—and their stomachs. ♦



Bond gets taken for a ride

James Bond behind the wheel of a Honda? If the image strikes you as ridiculous, you're not alone. MGM, the company that owns the Bond films, is suing Honda and its ad agency for putting the dapper spy in two commercials for the decidedly unglamorous Del Sol.

Bond isn't actually mentioned in the ads by name, but in a suit filed in a Los Angeles court, MGM says the spots "patently rip off the essence of the James Bond character" and appropriate scenes from classic

films like *Dr. No* and *Goldfinger*. Besides, the studio sniffs, Bond wouldn't be caught dead in a "bottom-of-the-line car" like the Del Sol. MGM is asking the carmaker to take the spots off the air and pay the studio unspecified damages.

Pierce Brosnan, star of the next Bond flick, recently raised Bond's profile and some money for cancer research by opening a sale at a London department store. His late wife, who was a former Bond girl, died of cancer three years ago. ♦

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In His Own Write

After revving up *Speed*, Joss Whedon is now ready to save the *Alien* franchise

by Edward Gross

Joss Whedon wants to bring Warrant Officer Ellen Ripley back from the dead. And he's figured out how to do it: cloning.

This isn't merely the idle thought of a hardcore *Alien* fan, though Whedon is certainly that. The 30-year-old native New Yorker has been hired by Twentieth Century Fox to write *Alien 4*, one of the most anticipated, high-profile, science-fiction projects in active development. Not too bad for a young writer whose first feature script credit just three years ago was the lamentable *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a box-office dud that would have side-tracked the career of a lesser talent. Yet success can be a mixed bag. His sudden leap from obscurity to the

KNOCK, KNOCK: Joss Whedon (right) will return the *Alien* franchise to movie theaters



front ranks of Hollywood scripters, Whedon says, is laced with irony.

"In a way, I find that as I slowly become more successful as a writer, I have less power," muses the unassuming Whedon. "Once you start making the big money and working on the big projects, you lose freedom. All of a sudden there are movie stars, producers and a variety of people who are trying very hard to make [the project] work their way, and there's really no place for the writer. You may get to play in the big leagues, but you never actually get the ball."

But with or without the ball, he recognizes that he's come a long way to get where he is. After graduating from Westland College in Connecticut, Whedon packed up his dreams and moved to Los Angeles. Like thousands of other wanna-be Hollywood writers, he began his career by penning spec scripts. Such unsolicited mail is rarely read in Hollywood, but this young writer's talent managed to pierce the tinsel curtain—and he soon landed a steady job as a story editor for ABC's popular and critically lauded sitcom *Roseanne*.

Considering that the show's unstable star is the most consistently controversial celebrity in the country, it isn't surprising that his tenure with the sitcom came during a volatile period. And after one

season, he decided he had had enough and jumped ship.

"I liked the speed at which you had to turn something out on television," he says. "It taught discipline. In fact, at one point on *Roseanne* we fell behind and the plot of an episode was listed in *TV Guide* before we had written it. Deadlines really count in the medium. TV is tough, but it's all about the process. If it's good and you're turning out shows that are consistently good, then it's worth it. But there are certain times when it's only about the personalities involved. It's about this guy's power and that guy's vanity, and all of a sudden all you're doing is turning out work. Toward the end of the year on *Roseanne* that started to happen, which is why I quit. It was actually a lot of different factors, but basically the show started to suffer. It was all about who was angry at whom, and none of it was about 'What should happen in next week's show?'"

So he took a risk and moved from the top-rated *Roseanne* to the ill-fated *Parenthood*, the short-lived series based on the successful Ron Howard film. At the same time, he wrote a tongue-in-cheek screenplay called *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in which a high school cheerleader is recruited to battle the undead. Although pleased with his original script, he is bitterly disappointed with the final film.

"What I started with was a horror action-comedy," he says. "It had fright, it had camera movement, it had acting—all kinds of interesting things that weren't in the finished film. Apart from the jokes—and there had been a lot more of them, but all of my favorites were cut—it was supposed to have a little edge to it. It was supposed to be a visceral entertainment rather than a glorified sitcom where everybody stands in front of the camera, says their joke and exits. I wasn't happy with anything about it, although there are people who are faithful to it. I had one advantage in that the direction was so bland that the jokes kind of stood out, because they were the only things to latch onto. But that was a big disappointment. It could have been a lot better."

The movie bombed, a blow that would have forced many writers back to the safety—and drudgery—of episodic television. But Whedon kissed off *Buffy* and moved on—and up. So how, one may wonder, does a guy credited with a poorly received genre hybrid end up scripting the hotly sought-after *Alien 4*? Much of it has to do with his original version of *Buffy*, which featured a strong story arc for a female, combined with the original draft of the soon-to-be produced *Suspension*, a hard-core action film that he unabashedly admits is "*Die Hard* on a bridge." Hollywood remains a small community, and the quality of these scripts got attention. Soon, he



was given the opportunity to do some uncredited script doctoring (*Speed* and *Waterworld*)—trench warfare for writers, but a place where there can be big money and the opportunity to shine.

Basically, they call me in when they are making a movie that they should not be making,” he says with a laugh. “It can be, ‘Gosh, this one scene doesn’t work,’ or it can be, ‘Wow, this script sucks!’ For me, it is connecting whatever dots they already have. It’s taking everything that they’re wedded to and trying to work something good in between the cracks. In the case of *Speed*, there was a lot of opportunity to do that. I couldn’t change a single stunt, but I could change every word.”

Besides writing about 90 percent of the dialogue for *Speed*, he feels that his best work on the script consisted of things that no one would even notice.

“I was trying to make the whole thing track logically and emotionally so that all of those insane, over-the-top stunts would make sense,” says Whedon. “That’s the biggest part of the script-doctoring that I do. Somebody says, ‘We’ve got a guy falling off of a cliff and later he’s hanging off of a helicopter. We need you to tell us why. We need you to make the audience believe that he’s doing it for a reason.’ That’s what *Speed* was about, apart from writing jokes and that kind of thing.”

But the script doctor is still only a hired hand for people who already know what kind of movie they want. Despite spending more than six weeks with Kevin Costner on the set of *Waterworld*, Whedon doesn’t feel that he was given the same opportunity to help the script.

“The experience of *Waterworld* was pretty interesting and a very good example of what can happen [to such a big undertaking],” he says. “By the time I got there, there was too much going on for me to make a real difference. They were too far into it. With *Speed*, I could really work on it. But with *Waterworld*, there were only tiny cracks that I could get between. I’m not sure what kind of contribution I made.”

One thing he knows for sure: After *Alien 4*, he plans to take more control of his work by tackling directing chores as well as writing.

“There’s an agenda behind everything I’m doing,” he says. “I’ve gotten to the stage where I’m looking for something that I want to develop for myself as a director, and things have gotten to the point where people are taking that idea a little more seriously than they had a year ago. I think it’s time.”

But for the moment, it’s *Alien 4* that has captured his eye, and Whedon is the proverbial kid in the candy store, even though it has been a lengthy process.



SPEED DEMON: After a false start with *Buffy* (opposite page), Whedon jumped off the mark with *Speed*

“We had to work with the producers, we had to make the deal, we had to write a treatment and here we are a year and a half later,” he says. “But it’s okay. I’ve been dreaming about this my whole life. I saw *Alien* when I was 14, and there’s not another movie that’s had as big an impact on me viscerally or aesthetically. *Alien* changed the nature of science fiction as much as *Star Wars* did by turning it into a working man’s universe. It was a submarine movie. It was like that scene in *Star Wars* where Luke looks at the Millennium Falcon—which was the coolest thing I’d ever seen—and says, ‘What a piece of junk!’ Suddenly, you’re no longer looking at guys in flowing robes saying, ‘Mars will explode.’ Now science fiction is inhabited by you and me. That’s part of the appeal, along with the fact, of course, that they created a monster that was not only genuinely new but also

horribly resonant.

“That’s what was disappointing about the third one for me,” he adds. “I thought the attitude and the feel were great, but people want to see something different. They say, ‘We know the alien; we know it intimately. What’s new? What’s out there that’s different?’ When James Cameron made *Aliens*, he did that in spades just with the title alone. But then *Alien 3* said, ‘Yeah, well this one is small and kind of slow.’ Ooh,” he says with a laugh, “that’s scary!”

That film, in which Ripley crashed on a prison planet—and which culminated in her death once it was discovered that there was an alien queen incubating within her—was widely perceived as a failure.

Offers Whedon: “The last movie was beautiful to look at, but it was neither exciting nor scary, which is a travesty. So, yes, we might have to convince some people

who didn't like *Alien 3* [to see *Alien 4*]. By the same token, you don't have a piece of genius to live up to. If the third one had been as great as the first two, I wouldn't go near this. I would be too frightened. I know what I wanted from a third *Alien*, and it wasn't a bunch of bald guys running around getting eaten. It was just a bitter, bleak movie. It's like the sequel to *Planet of the Apes* where they nuked the Earth. I didn't feel that *Alien 3* was a step forward. A smaller, less ferocious alien was not what I imagined."

According to the writer, the previous films in the series were all modeled on distinct film genres that have rules—a submarine film, an army film and a prison film. "Only *Alien 3* wasn't really a prison movie, and that's where it failed," he says. "A friend of mine said, 'Look at all the bald British guys, you can't tell one from the other.' That's not prison genre. In prison genre films they're all Americans, very specifically, and they carry their own level of terror. It was hard to be scared of these guys. I think the thing that upset me the most is that they actually had a scene where people we didn't know were killed by the alien. That's bullshit! That totally betrays these movies, because nothing is more boring and pointless than somebody you don't know anything about being killed."

When Whedon first became involved with the project, there were a variety of rumors surrounding the plot of *Alien 4*.

First, there was *Alien vs. Predator*, based on the Dark Horse comic-book miniseries of the same name, which at one point seemed likely to go into production.

Says Whedon, "Some of us felt that might have sullied the *Alien* films. It becomes like *Destroy All Monsters*; you know, Godzilla, Rodan, Mothra and all the rest. Or Freddy vs. Jason. Actually, I think the reason it fell through is that it was so unbelievably complicated legally. There are something like 19 producers involved, and I don't think they could do it. My opinion is that it would have been a mistake."

Then there was the notion of the aliens coming to Earth. Although this particular idea is appealing to the writer, he doesn't really know where such a storyline would go dramatically.

"First of all," he offers, "it would require an enormous budget and gigantic scope, and I don't know if they're ready to make that commitment until they see if the series still has legs. Ultimately, it would have just been a backdrop that wouldn't affect the main part of the story or what the characters would be. What's interesting is that everybody thinks it would be a great idea, but what exactly about their coming to Earth do you want? Nobody, including me, can answer that. We know the Earth won't be like anything we recognize, so it's not like you'd be afraid the aliens are under your bed. Ultimately, I didn't know what we could extract from that idea, except a

mankind versus the aliens epic, this all-out war kind of thing.

"I love finite space," he adds, "and I think you need that in an *Alien* film. That's what James Cameron is so brilliant at, creating a space where you know everything you need to know and nothing else. What I'd like to do is create a very specific space like that, instead of doing something so huge that it becomes vague. You know, here are our people and here is our problem. What I think you get from them coming to Earth is the opposite."

So Whedon has discarded these possibilities and gone back to the core of the franchise—Ellen Ripley. Pending Sigourney Weaver's approval of the script, Ripley will return in *Alien 4* to continue her war with the creatures.

I got the gig by writing a treatment that did not involve her," Whedon says. "Then they said, 'We want her.' I guess the idea of doing an *Alien* movie without the anchor, which she is, makes them a little nervous. So I wrote a new treatment, and I'm very jealously guarding the whole plot. It's like, 'Kirk dies.' Once something gets on the Internet, forget it!

"But when they first suggested that we bring Ripley back," he adds, "my reaction was, 'Bullshit.' But now I've gotten so into it. Basically, once we figured out how to bring her back, I realized that there are a



BUT CAN HE WALK ON WATER?
Studio executives called Whedon to the *Waterworld* set for last-minute rewriting

PHOTO BY BETH LASKE, VARIETY © 1994



"It's important that the cloning be a really torturous, even a sort of grotesque process so the audience can feel what it's like to be horribly reborn in a lab."

lot of interesting changes that I can bring to that character. I think I can make people buy it from frame one."

One image that comes to mind is *Dallas*' Bobby Ewing in the shower. "I've made that joke, actually," smiles Whedon. "Of course, Ripley did die in *Alien 3*. But if we can clone dinosaurs and get people to buy it, we can certainly clone a thirtysomething actress."

Although Ripley will be brought back thanks to cloning technology, she will not be the same character that audiences met in the first three films. The aliens, too, will be genetically different. But Whedon says this isn't the most important thing.

"The movie needs to be more exciting and scary than any other movie that comes out," he emphasizes. "It's the ride, and a sci-fi coolness factor, that's important. The genetics issue is definitely secondary to other things: What are they are going to look like? What are they going to do? Who are they going to kill?"

"We're dealing with Ripley's resurrection responsibly," Whedon elaborates. "We're not just saying, 'Oh, Sigourney's back, let's go make the movie!' It's the central issue of the movie, the fact that we bring her back. Once you do that, everything must be different. If somebody comes back from the dead, especially in a movie where death is the ultimate threat, you can't just say: 'It's okay, anybody can die and come back because we can do this now.' It's very important to me that it be a very torturous, sort of grotesque process so the audience can feel what it's like to be sort of horribly reborn in a lab. And Ripley's not too happy about being brought back. She's angry and has to deal with a lot of shit. What's interesting for me is that she can be running a whole gamut of emotions. She can be amused when it's not funny, she can be all kinds of different people at this

point—rather than just playing that same note again. I want to write a juicy part for Sigourney; I want to have fun with it."

One particular question comes to mind: Wasn't Ripley already impregnated with the alien queen at the time her DNA samples were taken? Whedon gives a hint of a smile in response. "Is she all woman or is there just a little something wrong?" he asks cryptically. "The whole intention is that when she comes back from the dead,

she has to be larger than life."

And will the return of Ripley also herald the return to megapopularity of the *Alien* franchise?

"Resurrecting Ripley is a no-brainer," Whedon says. "Getting the franchise back on track—I'm not going to take on that responsibility. As I said before, each one of these movies had a very specific model, and finding a model is probably my biggest challenge. I have the plot of the movie, the characters, the whole arc—but, visually, I want to find a new feel for it that does not betray the look of the other ones. Again, I think the third one put the nail in dark, grimy corridors. It's hard to find something that people will look at and go, 'Oh, they're doing this and look at this place that we're in.' It should be new and exciting but still feel like an *Alien* movie. I'm no production designer, but I can't work unless I work completely visually; I need to understand exactly the space that everybody is in, especially for an action movie. That, for me, is the hard part."

What's easy is knowing exactly what he wants to deliver. "I want every scene to contain something special," he says simply. "I want to do an *Evil Dead*, where it's really menacing and never stops. That's what I want to do. My only qualification for this is that I'm the biggest fan and I demand what the biggest fan wants. I want it all."

And it looks like he'll get it. ♦

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THE RISE AND FALL OF ANAKIN SKYWALKER

George Lucas' space epic continues as the early adventures of Luke's father and Obi-Wan Kenobi take center stage in the upcoming Star Wars trilogy

by John L. Flynn

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away..." Eighteen years after those words first scrolled across a movie screen, they still fill us with wonderment, awe and a heightened sense of expectation. Through novels, comics, games and the three movies themselves, George Lucas' *Star Wars* saga continues to mesmerize fans with the exploits of Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Princess Leia, Ben Kenobi and Darth Vader. These are not simply popular movie characters; they are American pop myths, cultural symbols establishing who we are and where we're from. And now, Lucas has announced what millions of fans have been waiting years to hear: More big-screen *Star Wars* adventures are in the works.

With the advent of advanced computer graphics (first introduced by Industrial Light and Magic in *The Abyss*, later showcased in *Terminator 2* and *Jurassic Park*), Lucas is now convinced that moviemaking technology has caught up with his imagination, allowing him to make the movies he

sees in his head without breaking the bank. So, 20 years after tackling the original *Star Wars* script, the filmmaker has said he's begun to write his three *Star Wars* "pre-quels," which he expects to film between 1995 and the turn of the century.

This new trilogy, set about a generation before the action in *Star Wars*, has fueled excited and ever-escalating rumors for more than a decade. Lucas has kept purposely tight-lipped for fear that some movie-of-the-week might "borrow" key elements (like *Battlestar Galactica* did), and he is certain to offer a fair share of surprises. Yet, drawing from Lucasfilm-approved *Star Wars* canon, the content of the yet-to-be-made movies is not a complete mystery. By looking back at the original films, their novelizations and early drafts of the *Star Wars* script (which include a malleable storyline for the entire nine-episode saga), we are offered tantalizing clues to these much-anticipated movies.

With *Star Wars*, Lucas sought to create an epic fantasy adventure that would introduce modern children to traditional moral



SABER OF LOVE: Ben teaches Luke all the knight moves

themes and concepts using the classic hero versus villain structure.

"I wanted to make a kid's film that would strengthen contemporary mythology and introduce a kind of basic morality," Lucas explained in 1983. "Nobody was saying the very basic things; they were dealing in the abstract. Everybody was forgetting to tell the kids, 'Hey, this is right and this is wrong.'"

In the early 1970s, Lucas wrote dozens of draft scripts and story treatments inspired by Flash Gordon serials, fantasy adventure novels and traditional parables. One of the most detailed early scripts followed Luke's father Anakin Skywalker (originally Starkiller), specifically examining his relationship with Obi-Wan Kenobi and how, by following the easy path, he was eventually transformed into the evil Darth Vader. Fearing that the story would bore modern children because it focused more on character development than action, Lucas shelved the treatment in favor of the later story that became *Star Wars*. But he never abandoned the script. The earlier material became the backstory from which *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* would unfold—and therefore logically serves as the focus of the "pre-quals." This backstory from the original trilogy has made certain basic plot points about the upcoming films somewhat immutable.

With *Star Wars*, Lucas acknowledges that he was particularly influenced by the writings of the late Joseph Campbell (in

particular, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*). Campbell, who chronicled the power of myths to define moral boundaries and shape our concepts of ourselves, wrote that mythic heroes in every culture share a common, usually dangerous journey that begins with a *Separation* from home in what he terms the "call to adventure." These heroic figures—though often reluctant—are forced by circumstances (or fate, if you will) to undertake their dangerous adventure and face severe tests, which they may indeed fail. Their trek into what Joseph Conrad called the heart of darkness leads to an *Initiation*, in which they gain valuable insight into the dual nature of the universe and themselves. That insight, often nurtured by a mentor, helps them face a confrontation with the dark father and endure wounding, even dismemberment. Heroes who survive the ordeal are awarded great treasure (either physical or spiritual), and *Return* with their treasure to empower or control other men. "Luke Skywalker's adventures clearly follow this path—and the new trilogy is also likely to follow the same narrative structure, though Luke's father often makes wrong turns that were avoided by the son.

Whereas *Return of the Jedi* establishes the final disposition of Lord Vader, who serves as the classic Greek tragic hero, Anakin Skywalker's journey from pure-hearted Jedi Knight to Dark Lord of the Sith and back begins about 20 years earlier in what has been referred to as the Clone Wars.

EPISODE ONE: THE CLONE WARS

"For over a thousand generations, the Jedi Knights were the guardians of peace and justice in the Old Republic...."

Having completed his training as a Jedi Knight, under the tutelage of Jedi Master Yoda, young Obi-Wan Kenobi faces his first test as a warrior in the Clone Wars, a conflict between the Republic and outside forces that helped undermine the internal viability of the Republic. (One clue to the look and nature of the Republic's Clone Wars opposition can be found in the novelization of *The Empire Strikes Back* by Donald Glut. When Boba Fett is first introduced in the novel, he is described as wearing "a weapon-covered, armored spacesuit, the kind worn by a group of evil warriors defeated by the Jedi Knights during the Clone Wars.")

Moviegoers know that Obi-Wan gained experience in this conflict and studied under Yoda because the Jedi warrior tells Luke that he once "fought in the Clone Wars," and that he (like Luke) was a "reckless" pupil under Yoda. Leia, in her holographic message in *Star Wars*, affirms Obi-Wan's war story: "General Kenobi, years ago you served my father in the Clone Wars." Obi-Wan evidently rises quickly in the service of Leia's adoptive father, Bail Organa, viceroy and chairman of the Alderaan system, and is awarded the rank of general.

In the novelization of *Star Wars*,

Kenobi admits to Luke that Darth Vader was "one of my brightest disciples ... one of my greatest failures," so it is possible that Obi-Wan first meets Anakin Skywalker while the general is training and leading soldiers and young Jedi in combat. Perhaps Anakin was, as Luke has been told, simply "a navigator on a space freighter," and only later became "the best star-pilot in the galaxy, and a cunning warrior." The young Jedi-in-training heeds Kenobi's call to help save the Republic during the Clone Wars.

Meanwhile, in "the bright center of the galaxy," on the Republic's capital city-planet Aquilae, the ambitious young Senator Palpatine, manipulating the restlessness and political infighting caused by war anxiety, promises "to reunite the disaffected among the people and to restore the remembered glory of the Republic." He plans to use the current crisis—the Clone Wars—to engineer his election as president. But some members of the Republic's High Council are dubious of Palpatine's stated objectives, and seek to block his election. These senators include Bail Organa, Mon Mothma and others (who will eventually form the Rebel Alliance). Among the members of these powerful political families is likely to be the woman who will marry Anakin Skywalker and bear his children, Luke and Leia. (Let's call this woman Lady Arkady, since Lucas has a tendency to pair couples or siblings with the same vowel or consonant.) While the background of Luke and Leia's mother is purely speculative, it is founded on some known story elements. Luke and Leia are noble-born, and Leia—following Anakin's capitulation to the dark side of the Force—is taken by her mother "to live as the 'adopted' daughter of Senator Organa, on Alderaan," according to the novelization of *The Return of the Jedi*. The 'droids See-Threeepio and Artoo-Detoo are likely to make their appearance in the new series as Republic government bureaucrats under the charge of Organa, as that is how Lucas envisioned them in his original *Star Wars* treatment. The androids' inter-trilogy adventures begin as they leave Aquilae for Alderaan in the company of Bail Organa and Lady Arkady, who recognize they are losing the political battle to save the Republic and seek a safer base of operations.

Narrowly defeated in an election for the presidency of the

Republic, Palpatine seizes power "through subterfuge, bribery and terror." His first executive act is to order the destruction of Organa's party as they return to Alderaan, with specific instructions to make their deaths appear the result of an enemy raid. "Aided and abetted by restless, power-hungry individuals within the government and the massive organs of commerce," he assumes near-absolute control of the tottering Republic, influencing by force of arms (or through his powers as an evil sorcerer) most High Council representatives and numerous guilds. His inevitable emergence as emperor and the dissolution of the High Council are documented in the novelization of *Star Wars*.

But while Palpatine's power play is clearly defined, the Clone Wars remain a mystery. Few details surface in the books, and even fewer are revealed in the three films or the earlier drafts of the original screenplay. One can conjecture that the Jedi Knights are fighting to prevent cloning technology from being used to create a terrible weapon or army that would be used against the Republic. Obi-Wan (O.B.-one) might even be some sort of clone designation, identifying the first clone of a man with the initials O.B.—a designation that Kenobi later replaced with the name "Ben."

Perhaps, as the Jedi ranks precipitously fell (through disease or other causes), scientists in the Old Republic were forced to clone their warriors. When information about that technology first surfaced, sinister forces from worlds outside the Republic may have sought out the technology to strengthen their armies. With the successful end of the wars, fearing that the technology might once again be used for evil, the Jedi may destroy the technology and all information about cloning.

The first film of the



new trilogy could logically close with victory in the Clone Wars, the rescue of Viceroy Bail Organa and his party by Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker, and at the least, temporary defeat of the evil forces threatening the Republic from within. Perhaps, like *Star Wars*, this prequel ends with a dramatic space battle and the triumphant return of its victors. As Palpatine schemes to transform the Republic into his own evil fiefdom, Kenobi and his young apprentice are lavished with medals, and Anakin Skywalker finds favor with both Lady Arkady and, ominously, Senator Palpatine.

The Clone Wars (a purely speculative title, of course), like the first act of a much

longer work, provides exposition for the major characters (Anakin Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Lady Arkady, Bail Organa and Senator Palpatine), introduces two important conflicts (one, dealing with the Clone Wars, that finds resolution, and the other, concerning the future of the Republic, which awaits resolution) and ends triumphantly. Subplots such as Palpatine's political machinations, Kenobi's fallibility as a teacher, and Anakin and Arkady's relationship remain purposely unresolved until the next film. Central to the unfolding drama is the reckless, young protagonist (Anakin) whose innocent and vulnerable nature will be tested by truly extraordinary circumstances.

EPISODE TWO: THE RISE OF DARTH VADER

"Once, under the wise rule of the Senate and the protection of the Jedi Knights, the Republic thrived and grew," Lucas wrote in *Star Wars*. "But as often happens when wealth and power pass beyond the admirable and attain the awesome, then appear those evil ones who had greed to match...."

Some time has passed since the Jedi's victory brought an end to the Clone Wars, but in that time boredom and complacency have exacted a terrible toll on the Old Republic. Palpatine-promoted corruption, bribery and terror have reduced the High



Council to a collection of rubber-stamp legislators (except for a few fearless patriots, such as Bail Organa and Mon Mothma) and a massive, faceless bureaucracy maintains control over the various star systems. Even the once-great Jedi Knights have been slowly supplanted by Palpatine's own Sith Lords and their elite guard. "Like the greatest of trees, the Republic rotted from within though the danger was not visible from outside," Lucas wrote.

The decline of the Republic casts a dark shadow over the lives of Anakin Skywalker and Obi-Wan Kenobi. This middle story in the new trilogy is likely the turning point in Anakin Skywalker's life. Like all great mythological heroes, he faces a severe test, engineered no doubt by Palpatine. Joseph Campbell refers to this stage as "the belly of the whale," offering that a true hero needs courage to fight demons from within as well as from without. He further concludes that only by shrugging off fear, anger and aggression ("the dark side of the Force are they," says Yoda) does a hero survive and prosper. But, unable to combat base desires and common fears, Anakin succumbs to Palpatine's influence. Obi-Wan later reveals to Luke that Anakin "was seduced by the dark side of the Force. He ceased to be Anakin Skywalker and became Darth Vader. When that happened, the good man who was your father was destroyed."

Though little is known about Anakin and Lady Arkady's courtship and marriage, we do know that they produce Luke and Leia. But Anakin never knows his children. Impatient, reckless and disappointed by his own failures, Anakin leaves his wife and friends to pursue a new course of study

under Palpatine—before his wife reveals that she is pregnant. Twenty years later, Kenobi explains to Luke: "When your father left, he didn't know your mother was pregnant. Your mother and I knew he would find out eventually, but we wanted to keep you both as safe as possible." Obi-Wan, a trusted friend and confidant, agrees to keep her secret safe, and later helps her hide the children. "To protect you both from the emperor, you were hidden from your father when you were born," Ben tells Luke. "I took you to live with my brother Owen on Tatooine ... and your mother took Leia to live as the daughter of Senator Organa, on Alderaan." The plan to secretly relocate the children (perhaps inspired by

Malory's *L'morte de Arthur*) grows out of the sacred trust established between the knight-errant protector—Obi-Wan—and his fallen friend's wife.

Since Anakin Skywalker is such a "powerful Jedi" (according to Yoda), he does not fall easily to Palpatine. But by exploiting his insecurities and promising wealth, position and power, the evil sorcerer gradually turns Anakin to the dark side. A rift obviously forms between Kenobi and his former apprentice, and Obi-Wan is forced to take action. "When I saw what had become of him, I tried to dissuade him, to draw him back from the dark side. We fought ... your father fell into a molten pit," Ben tells Luke in *Return of the Jedi*. Their climactic struggle over the "molten pit" probably ends the second film in traditional cliffhanger fashion. "When your father clawed his way out of that fiery pool," Obi-Wan told Luke, "the change had been burned into him forever—he was Darth Vader ... irredeemably dark. Scarred. Kept alive only by machinery

Star Wars, completed in January 1975, the primary plot device was the search for a Kiber Crystal. ("The Kaiburr [sic] Crystal was a powerful energy source which gave the owner such powers over the Force that he would be all but invincible," wrote Allan Dean Foster in *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*.) Obsessed with possessing the powerful red crystal, Palpatine has dispatched his forces in an effort to find the gem. Anakin's discovery of the crystal might fuel the growing tension between he and Obi-Wan and provide a conclusion that otherwise might be missing with the audience's knowledge of Anakin's survival.

EPISODE THREE: FALL OF THE REPUBLIC

"Once secure in his office, he [Palpatine] declared himself Emperor, shutting himself away from the populace. Soon he was controlled by the very assistants and boot-lickers he had appointed to



BY GEORGE Lucas hasn't decided yet whether to lens the second trilogy himself

and his own black will."

Of course, audiences already know that he survived the pit, but to Obi-Wan and the others, his death appears certain. When Obi-Wan retrieves Anakin's lightsaber (which he will one day give to Luke), he bids farewell to a good friend. Unbeknownst to the Jedi, below him in the fiery pool of death a scorched hand reaches up for life. Anakin Skywalker may well be dead, but Darth Vader lives....

This deadly struggle between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker could logically form the central conflict in the middle film, but its action-oriented background story must be equally compelling. Like the search for the Holy Grail in the third Indiana Jones film, much of the action in this character-driven story could be centered around a quest for some great energy source. In Lucas' second screenplay for

high office...." The implication of this passage from the novelization of *Star Wars* is that Palpatine himself faces an internal struggle to maintain control of his empire. By the third film of the new trilogy, the Republic almost certainly will have fallen, and chaos and anarchy are at hand unless the emperor can demonstrate the awesome power of the "dark side." Acquiring a great power source, like the Kiber Crystal, is one way; the other is to commit some outrageous abomination that will strike fear and terror into the hearts of those who seek to control him. He may choose both paths.

The emperor's first action is the resurrection of Anakin Skywalker as Darth Vader. Perhaps through a montage, the once-great Jedi is saved and transformed by a life-giving mechanical black helmet along with black robes, a flowing black cape and "black armor—armor which, though black

FUTURE SHOCK

Francis Ford Coppola, rarely at a loss for words, could only mutter one: "strange..."

The filmmaker had just witnessed George Lucas' *THX 1138* (1971), and his response to it proved to be a common one. Coppola, who produced the picture, had hoped it would launch his independent film company, American Zoetrope. Instead, the movie almost buried it.

The film's themes are conventional: humanity's losing battle with modern technology; the value of individualism; the suffocating weight of the status quo. Filmed at the height of the counterculture (Lucas was a cameraman the previous year for *Gimme Shelter*, the acclaimed documentary of the Rolling Stones' Altamont concert), *THX* warns of the dangers of the drug culture while embracing the hippies' call to "drop out



THE FORCE IS WITH HIM:
Robot cops punish Duvall
for crimes against the state

As the creator of the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* series, Lucas has been accused of avoiding complex ideas and stories. But *THX 1138*, his first feature film, disproves that charge. Drawing from the nightmares of Orwell and Huxley, the young director fashioned a future in which perpetually drugged workers shuffle through a grim daily routine. "Work hard, increase production, prevent accidents and be happy" intones their disembodied, Godlike overseer.

Two subversives in this subterranean world are *THX 1138* (Robert Duvall) and *LUH 3417* (Maggie McOmie), who abstain from their medication and soon feel the pull of physical attraction for the first time. Tentatively, they have sex (an illegal act in this test tube-baby society)—and fall in love. But their enlivening human bliss is short-lived. Convicted of drug evasion and sexual perversion, *THX* is sent to the White Limbo, a psychological prison that traps inmates in the barbed wire of their own fears.

of society. In the Beckettian White Limbo, the prisoners endlessly discuss freedom but never act. *THX*, however, achieves liberty by swallowing his fear and walking into the White Infinity. "If we're not careful about the way we conduct our lives," Lucas said of the film's message, "we're going to live in a society devoid of pain and risk—but insulated, emotionless and much more unpleasant."

Lucas co-wrote, directed and edited *THX 1138*, and the 27-year-old filmmaker was proud of the result. But Warner Bros failed to share his optimism, excising four minutes from the original cut and giving it only a limited release. With its washed-out imagery, in-your-face polemics and confusing narrative, the movie fared poorly at the box office—prompting Warners to cancel its five-picture deal with American Zoetrope. But in the 23 years since its lackluster initial release, *THX* has gained a devoted following. It remains Lucas' most challenging work, a fascinating and intelligent—if sometimes impenetrable—sci-fi parable.

—Douglas Perry

it was, was not nearly as dark as the thoughts drifting through the mind within." As Lucas writes in the *Star Wars* novel, the Dark Lord, more machine than man, leads the emperor's effort to "hunt down and destroy the Jedi Knights." With the Jedi on the run, Palpatine's plan for conquest and terror has only just begun.

Meanwhile, Obi-Wan eludes Vader's hunt and, perhaps with Yoda, undertakes the rescue of Lady Arkady and her two children. Luke and Leia represent the future of the Jedi Knights and perhaps the only real hope for the restoration of the Republic. "The Emperor knew, as I did, that if Anakin were to have any offspring, they would be a threat to him," Ben explains to Luke.

In a possible denouement for the trilogy, Obi-Wan slips through the empire's defenses and rescues Skywalker's family. Leia and her mother then go to live on Alderaan, in the safety of Bail Organa's still-powerful family, while Obi-Wan delivers Luke to his brother Owen Lars, possibly stopping first on Dagobah to bid Yoda farewell. (When he arrives on Dagobah, Luke tells Artoo-Detoo "there's something familiar about this place," suggesting that he has some childhood memory buried deep in his subconscious.) Obi-Wan then settles on Tatooine, not far from his brother's moisture farm, changes his name to Ben and awaits the day when the young Luke will heed his own call to adventure. The film ends on a hopeful note. Even though the Republic has fallen to a greedy and corrupt politician and his sinister forces, a new Republic will someday emerge from the ashes of the old.

Darth Vader, his humanity lost in the molten pit following his fight with Obi-Wan, fails to secure his children and wife and knows that he and the empire are vulnerable. Continuing Lucas' morality tale for children, the new trilogy could end with Vader alone and fearful of the future, his power within the empire unable to save him. When Anakin emerges from the molten pit as the Dark Lord of the Sith, he's taken the wrong treasure. And as often befalls a tragic hero, he is punished for his actions. Only much later—in *Return of the Jedi*—does Vader learn that the real treasure to be won is the inner courage that his son demonstrates before the emperor. And, recognizing the real prize, Vader's belated act of courage redeems him, saves his son and destroys the empire.

EYES ON THE PRIZE

In a few years, the speculation will evaporate as Lucas brings his new movies to the screen. Men and women raised on the exploits of Luke, Leia, Han and Darth Vader will now take their children to see the earlier adventures of Anakin and Obi-Wan. Until then, impatient fans of the saga will hope that the Force is with them. ♦

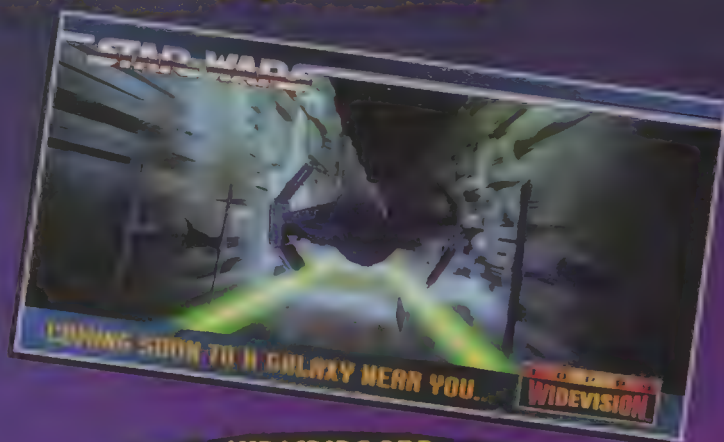
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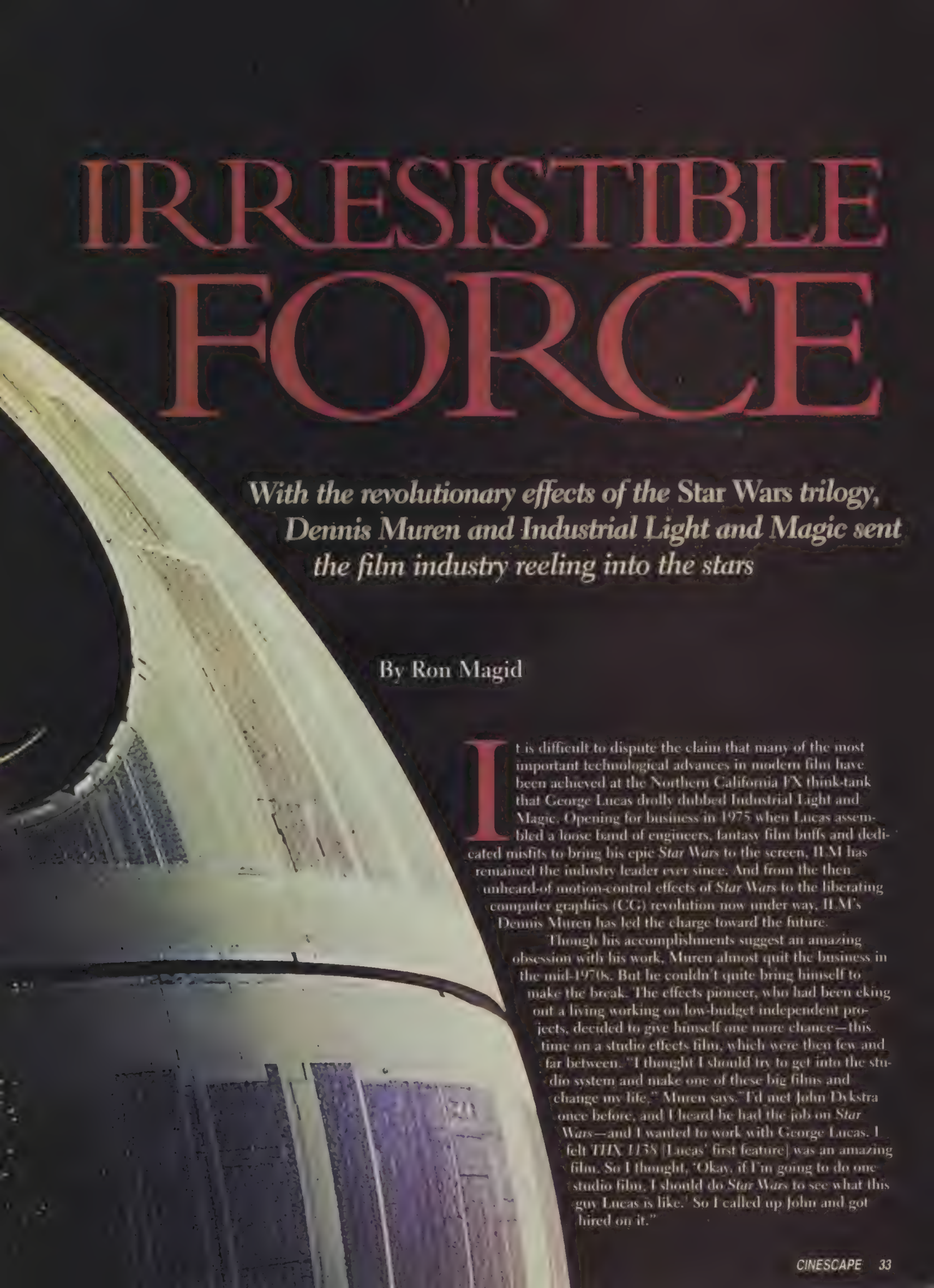
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IRRESISTIBLE FORCE

With the revolutionary effects of the Star Wars trilogy, Dennis Muren and Industrial Light and Magic sent the film industry reeling into the stars

By Ron Magid

It is difficult to dispute the claim that many of the most important technological advances in modern film have been achieved at the Northern California FX think-tank that George Lucas drolly dubbed Industrial Light and Magic. Opening for business in 1975 when Lucas assembled a loose band of engineers, fantasy film buffs and dedicated misfits to bring his epic *Star Wars* to the screen, ILM has remained the industry leader ever since. And from the then unheard-of motion-control effects of *Star Wars* to the liberating computer graphics (CG) revolution now under way, ILM's Dennis Muren has led the charge toward the future.

Though his accomplishments suggest an amazing obsession with his work, Muren almost quit the business in the mid-1970s. But he couldn't quite bring himself to make the break. The effects pioneer, who had been eking out a living working on low-budget independent projects, decided to give himself one more chance—this time on a studio effects film, which were then few and far between. "I thought I should try to get into the studio system and make one of these big films and change my life," Muren says. "I'd met John Dykstra once before, and I heard he had the job on *Star Wars*—and I wanted to work with George Lucas. I felt *THX 1138* [Lucas' first feature] was an amazing film. So I thought, 'Okay, if I'm going to do one studio film, I should do *Star Wars* to see what this guy Lucas is like.' So I called up John and got hired on it."

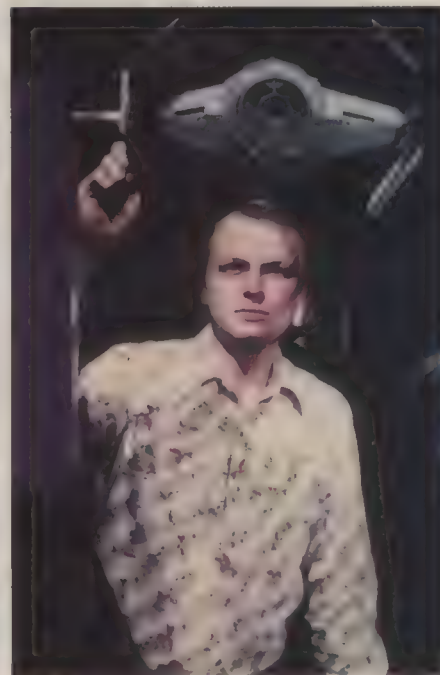


as flexible as your eyes, as if you were really watching these things happen. I grew up looking at movies that had locked-off effects shots; it didn't matter if it was a major Academy Award-winning movie, if the stuff was locked off, it just didn't look right. The only exception is [Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It looked like everything was moving in that film. It was very tricky, very clever, the way the backgrounds were designed. The spaceships weren't moving very much, but they looked like it."

Despite Muren's reverence for *2001*, it wasn't one of his prime influences when prepping *Star Wars*. "We never looked back on those films. There were two L.A. effects groups going all through the late '60s and early



TRENCH WARFARE: Dennis Muren (right) orchestrated the Death Star battle between TIE fighters (below) and Rebel X-wings (top)



Sounds easy—and it probably was. In the run-up to the special effects revolution that followed *Star Wars*, there were few people who understood the still-nascent world of special effects, let alone had hands-on experience. Muren was well qualified—and he could prove it, having written, directed, produced and supervised effects for an ambitious student project called *The Equinox*. "It was just an amateur film I did between my freshman and sophomore years at Pasadena City College. I'd been shooting all these home movies since I was a kid and I thought it'd be a good idea to get one into the theatre!" he says with a laugh. "I thought it would be kind of easy to do. We started in June and we were supposed to be done in September, but it ended up being two years before it was finished. It didn't have any space effects, but it did have three or four fantasy stop-motion sequences. There

was no money so there was no optical printer work, in fact there was nothing we could afford; we had to build everything ourselves. We built a front projection unit so we could composite our creatures in-camera and I jerry-rigged an optical printer and did a few dupe shots near the end."

Muren's youthful optimism was rewarded: The film was released theatrically in 1969 as simply *Equinox*. Despite the film's severe financial limitations, Muren managed to create some pretty nice model effects, immeasurably enhanced by his moving camera work which made the shots more fluid. "I tried to put pans and tilts in a couple of shots, just to fool the audience," he says.

Muren's early success with freeing the camera encouraged a career-long obsession: creating effects photography that moves as smoothly as live-action shots. "It helps the reality so much if the camera is

'70s. The group I was in came from the *King Kong* school, literally. We had no money for tools, so we had to make our shots by adding camera moves or artistic lighting or something to make them look special. The other school was the one that came out of the success of *2001*. They used mechanical technologies. I think that *Star Wars* was a mixture of those two groups. Ken Ralston and I weren't particularly interested in the mechanical stuff. I was always watching the dynamics of motion in movies, where they used camera pans to add some style and stuff like that, but it didn't have anything to do with technology. I can't remember exactly what my influences were, but they would've been literally as screwy as *The Flying Tigers* and *The Bridges of Toko-Ri*."

Muren's war movie influences were invaluable for *Star Wars*: the Death Star attack is, after all, a dogfight in space. He

served as visual-effects second cameraman on *Star Wars* for more than a year, from April of 1976 through May of 1977. "We really didn't get going on that show until August. Up until that time, there was equipment being built and a lot of effort was going into designing and fitting the gear up. Since there was only one flexible track camera, Richard Edlund shot during the day and I shot at night. Ken Ralston was my assistant." (Ralston would later become an FX supervisor in his own right, forging a lasting relationship with Robert Zemeckis on the *Back to the Future* series, *Death Becomes Her* and *Forrest Gump*.)

where actors, spacecraft miniatures or other objects are filmed against a blue background, which is later replaced by the live-action or synthetic background the audience will see on the screen. This technique allowed Lucas to place his actors in matte-painted or miniature environments, greatly enhancing *Star Wars'* epic scope.

A much bigger breakthrough was the pioneering of motion control, which enabled ILM's effects wizards to computer-program every movement of the miniature spacecraft and cameras. The "control" aspect is a function of computerization and precisely machined mechanical dollies,

pan and tilt heads and model movers—allowing for frame-by-frame "repeatability," which is the key to modern effects shots. Repeatability means that the computerized motions of the cameras can be translated and scaled to live-action backgrounds, so that model and background can be locked together in the same frame with the same camera move. It also means that the models themselves can be photographed in several passes for optimum aesthetic beauty: Separate passes can be shot for each color separation, for miniature lights and, by backlighting the model, to create perfect mattes. And because each pass is filmed



BIRD OF PREY: Han Solo's Millennium Falcon flees from an Imperial Star Destroyer (above); and a couple of pesky TIE fighters chase the ship through the galaxy (below)

"The workload wasn't terrible," Muren insists. "We could get a lot of work done at night. I'd come in at three o'clock in the afternoon and talk to George for about 20 minutes, go over the storyboards we were going to shoot that night, go out and have dinner and then work pretty much straight through from four till midnight."

At the time, Muren and his fellow effects pros might have felt that getting *Star Wars* into theaters without missing scenes was the biggest breakthrough. But looking back on a film made almost 20 years ago with technology that now seems ancient, Muren proudly points out *Star Wars'* many achievements. "One was refining bluescreen photography so it was like factory work, making it so that we could put a lot of work through quickly and get a lot of mattes done and a lot of comping." Bluescreen is a technique





with the same computerized camera move, they lock together perfectly.

"I thought *Star Wars* was the first big application of motion control," Muren says. "But someone mentioned that Doug Trumbull may have done something like it for *Silent Running*. I know for 2001, they turned motors on and kept their fingers crossed! *Silent Running* was probably a little more sophisticated than that, but not a whole lot. We could program and vary the speeds of the three motors on the camera, the two motors on the track and five motors on the model, run them forward or backward and get them to repeat. The operator programmed all the dynamics of the shot, so the vision of the shot was lifted off a flat 2-D storyboard and came alive in 3-D space and time. That meant we no longer had to worry about the "strobiness"

of stop-motion or rely on gravity and accidents when we used things like wires."

But before *Star Wars*' release, Muren wasn't sure if he was working on something special. "You know, I thought the script was terrific but impossible to do. It reminded me of *The Wizard of Oz* with all these crazy creatures running around a Death Star, and I thought, 'This movie is just wild!' but I didn't know if there'd be any audience for it. And the visuals—it was too hard for me to see what was unique about it, because all I could see then were the problems we had getting the motion-control work to look fluid. I still look at the problems. But I think the dynamics of the movement were so staggering to people that they didn't see those things."

Audiences had never seen anything like it. Despite its technical limitations, *Star*

Wars features some of the best-designed effects shots ever, and design will invariably overcome technical limitations. Indeed, the shot of the Imperial Star Destroyer that opens the film is one of the most graphic and beautiful in film history, not to mention the Millennium Falcon's slitscan leap into hyperspace. The trip through the Death Star trench was an amazing piece of film then—and in spite of technical advances, it remains so now. "That image is really great," Muren agrees. "You know, George used animatics [makeshift effects shots, sometimes culled from other films] for most of the space battle and the entire dogfight, which was a big help. They were cut together from scenes in old war films and documentaries that he'd shot off a television set, examples of planes going left to right and right to left, showing how big they were in the frame. They really helped him get closer to a moving image, instead of words or storyboards, so he could understand the sequence before he shot his backgrounds and his actors. When we showed him our X-wing shots, George was constantly saying, 'That's kind of what these shots should look like, the X-wings are big enough in frame and their direction's right, but the background has to be going five times faster.' That was really hard for Richard Edlund and I to comprehend because we'd never seen anything like it. We'd shoot stuff and say, 'It's too fast, we can't even show this to George,' and then we'd show it to him and he'd say 'Faster!' And when you see the film now, you just accept it, but in the middle of it, we'd never done anything like that. I don't think anybody had actually isolated foregrounds to backgrounds and imagined how much incredible blur you can have in a background. But when you put an object in front of that background and cut that shot in sequence, it works. And if we slowed it down any, it would've really hurt the sequence."

Star Wars, returning science-fiction moviemaking to its swashbuckling roots, revitalized a genre that had grown stale on overly serious narrative theses. And ILM revolutionized the tiny FX community, winning its first Visual Effects Oscar for its astonishing achievement. "There were moments in there that were really pretty striking. I guess the intent came through," Muren muses. "If the intent is sincere, then you'll forgive a lot."

But in the wake of *Star Wars*, audiences quickly became less forgiving. Within just a few years, as a wave of effects movies suddenly transformed the industry, ILM was feeling the pressure to top itself, to keep pushing the envelope as effects that had been ahead of their time quickly began looking old-fashioned to audiences. Muren was able to explore the dynamics of motion control with his next project, the *Battlestar Galactica* pilot, then

apply what he learned to one of the most exciting sequences in the *Star Wars* trilogy, the dizzying asteroid run in *The Empire Strikes Back*. "The dynamics of motion control were something I never really appreciated with *Star Wars* but appreciated tremendously when we did *Galactica*. I had a lot of freedom on *Galactica* to design shots, and during that show I saw that the potential was way beyond what we'd done in *Star Wars*. It's really using 3-D space. In *Star Wars*, I don't think there's that much of a sense of that, except for some very obvious shots. Some of the shots I did in *Galactica* really play that up, and that certainly comes through in *Empire's* asteroid sequence. You can design shots dynamically on paper, but they won't come across on film. It all depends on what lens you pick and the dynamics of the objects. A storyboard asteroid field coming toward you can look either flat or awesome on screen, depending on the choices you make."

In a sense, Lucas saw *Empire's* asteroid run as an opportunity to improve on the sequence in *Star Wars* where the

Millennium Falcon dodges the remnants of the planet Alderaan, which had been destroyed by the Death Star. "I'm not even sure how those shots were done," Muren says with a laugh. "I think they dropped some rocks by the camera! They certainly weren't motion control. That was just a point of view from the Falcon's windows. By the time we got to *Empire*, we wanted to show the Millennium Falcon navigating through a very dense asteroid belt. As it maneuvered around them, we wanted scale and more dynamics to the asteroids, so we went with an approach where we could choreograph the asteroids as opposed to just throwing gravel. We wanted to surprise people by having things coming at them from the sides of the frame, which isn't the way asteroid fields really are, but it looked much better on film."

For *Empire*, Lucas bumped Muren up to "visual effects director of photography," which enabled him to play a larger role in composing images for the film overall, rather than simply concentrating on certain sequences. "It was a much, much

bigger show. I probably spent two months trying to figure out the logistics of the schedule so we knew what background elements we could use twice, to get the show done on time. We reused backgrounds from the big Snow Walker scene and the asteroid sequence for shots of the background looking out the windows of the Speeders or the Falcon, which was important because every shot we used twice saved us a day. So on one hand, *Empire* was more to manage, but on the aesthetic side, I think that we attempted to give much more artistry to the shots than we had on *Star Wars*. The shots were better composed, better designed, made better use of lighting and color and had more dynamic motion to the things."

Muren knew that his FX Waterloo, so to speak, was going to be the battle on the ice planet Hoth between the Empire's Snow Walkers (or AT-ATs) and the rebels' Snow Speeders. There were so many shots to do, so very little time to do them in, and there



SNOW BIG DEAL: Imperial Snow Walkers (above) aren't quite so daunting up close (left)



was talk that the Walkers should be animated using motion control, which worried Muren. "It would've been neat but I don't know if they ever would have worked. It would've taken forever just to do. So I introduced stop-motion animation back into the *Star Wars* series with the Walkers. That was something the technical group didn't want to do. But stop-motion was tried and true and George thought it was a good idea because it made everything look more mechanical, and because it helped us get the movie done"—which, through no fault of Muren's, finished late and about \$10 million over budget.

Regardless of the reason for it, Muren was excited by the opportunity to use stop-motion animation again. "I thought, 'Boy, here's an opportunity that'll never happen again!' Then, stop motion wasn't even the old-fashioned way, it was like a temporary way! I was good friends with Jon Berg and

Phil Tippett and Doug Beswick and managed to get those guys up here to grab hold of that whole sequence and get it under control."

But there were even bigger hurdles ahead. One of the few saving graces for the FX crew on *Star Wars* was that most of the effects were composited against the blackness of space, which hid any dark matte lines around the bluescreened spacecraft. But the pristine, white, ice planet Hoth at high noon would give no quarter. Having overcome the new-technology folks on the motion-control issue, Muren now had to fight to shoot the Walkers in a miniature snowy landscape, rather than compositing bluescreen Walkers into live-action snow background plates. "The technological guys wanted to do it all bluescreen. I thought the technology we'd developed for *Star Wars* should not be applied to those scenes because bluescreen doesn't work well in daytime. So I managed to wrangle it in the other direction, the idea being that looking through the camera we could see what was wrong with the shot, and once it was shot, it was virtually finished."

The Empire Strikes Back

Back is notable, among other reasons, for being the first film to use Go-Motion, which was virtually the only refinement to stop-motion since its invention around the dawn of cinema.

Developed by Muren and stop-motion animation whiz Phil Tippett, Go-Motion involved stop-motion puppets with certain motorized joints that

moved just slightly as the camera shot a single frame of film. In the finished shot, those axes of movement gave the illusion of motion blur, rather than the strobing, mime-like look of some stop-motion. Muren and Tippett decided to try their new process on the rebels' snow-beasts, the Tauntauns, to distinguish their lifelike gallop from the mechanical stride of the Walkers. "Phil Tippett and I had been talking about motorizing something or other because we had all this gear here that we might as well use," Muren recalls. "We managed to get two motions out of our Go-Motion rig—a side view and coming toward camera. Phil did all the programming, which took forever—one or two

weeks to program each shot—but it looked really good. It didn't solve everything but it made those shots a little bit better. And that sequence primarily wasn't bluescreen, just like the Walkers."

Muren may be one of the great realists of his profession. Though he felt the stop-motion Walkers "looked okay for what they were," he was only willing to let them go as is for reasons of cost and time. "The problem is that we have a deadline," he says. "It's one thing to sit around and say, 'Boy, it would be really neat to do something that doesn't have strobing problems,' but the other side of it was that this movie had to be out in theaters in 18 months—and it obviously couldn't have 'scene missing' cards like they have in test screenings! That's serious, but nobody understands it until they're in that position."

For his work on *The Empire Strikes Back*, Muren received one of his eight Academy Awards. The next year, 1981, he at last made the leap to visual effects supervisor for *Dragonslayer*, where he and Phil Tippett put Go-Motion to its penultimate use. In 1982, he teamed with Steven Spielberg for the first time (most recently they worked together on *Jurassic Park*), helming effects for *E.T. The Extraterrestrial*. Then he returned to the *Star Wars* saga.

Mark Dippe, Muren's co-visual effects supervisor on *Jurassic Park*, once commented that to achieve *Return of the Jedi*'s composites with dozens of spacecraft buzzing around indicated a zenlike control over the universe. "By then, we were really cookin'," Muren demurs. "Ken Ralston and Richard Edlund did most of the spaceship stuff, I did most of the land-based stuff, and Bruce Nicholson did all the optical stuff. By that time, Bruce figured out practically everything, so whenever there were any stumbling blocks, he found new ways to go. We were really geared up for that show, and I think it shows in the quality of the work."

In retrospect, Muren feels that most of his *Return of the Jedi* achievements can be found in the stop-motion, two-legged Walker battle, which featured far more camera moves than *Empire*'s snow battle, and the exhilarating use of rod-puppets in the Speeder Bike chase, where Luke and Leia are pursued through the woods by Stormtroopers on flying Harleys. For most of the shots, Luke, Leia and the Speeder Bike pilots were 1/6-scale puppets, shot against bluescreen, with rods protruding out their backs and heads. "The motion-control Speeder Bikes were not shot with Go-Mo like we did the kids on the bikes in *E.T.* Instead, somebody, usually Mike McAlister, let the camera run as he very slowly pulled the rods and moved the head or body of the puppet, so it was really fast to shoot those things."

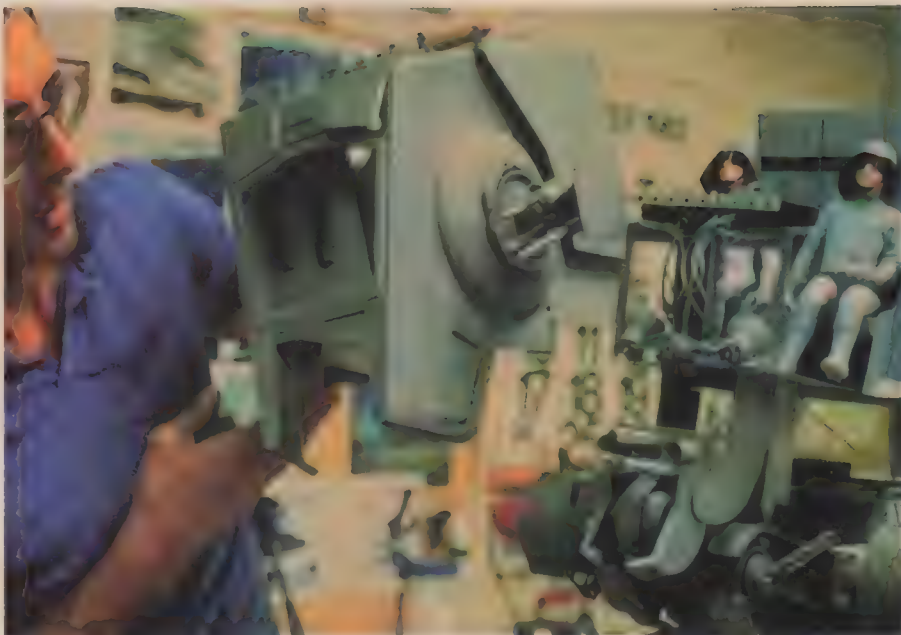
The Speeder Bike chase remains an

amazing piece of filmic artistry, a refined expression of George Lucas' space battle concept where the spaceships were in sharp focus against an incredibly blurred background. Muren insists that the extensive animatics he created enabled him and his cohorts to visualize and "adrenalize" the exciting sequence. "They sure did," Muren says, "just like in *Star Wars*. By doing the animatics first, we were able to break the sequence apart, then shoot the footage, and it came out just about the same. I tried not to think about it too much, because then you start shooting custom speeds for sideviews and backviews and you end up hurting it. Taking it an element at a time like that, everyone likes to tweak it, make each shot a little faster or a little slower, and then it wouldn't have been as effective when it was all cut together. I really approached that sequence like a documentary and shot it the way it would've really been—and when we put it together, it was right."

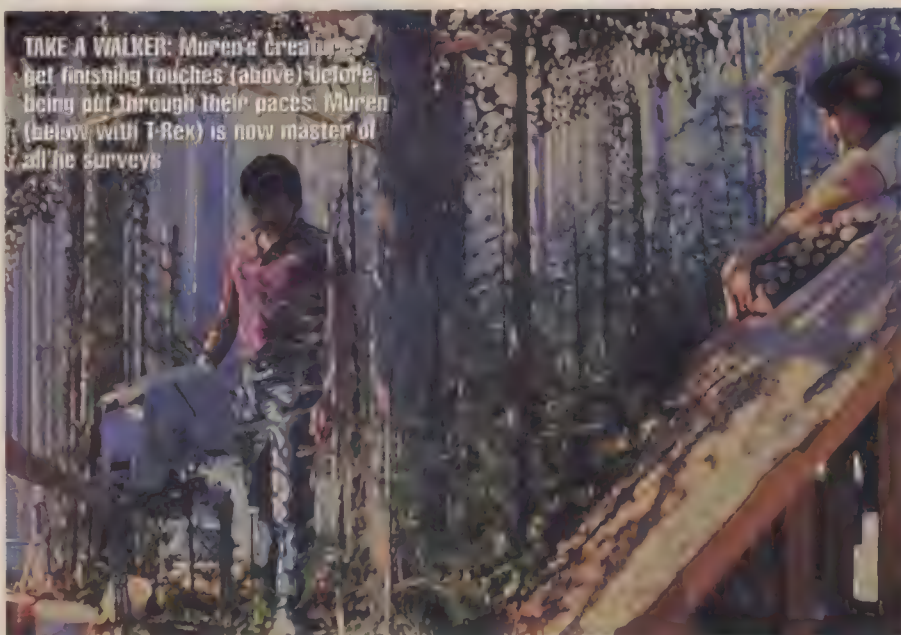
Not surprisingly, *Return of the Jedi* netted Muren another Academy Award, and he moved on to even bigger projects and more prizes. But now, in the wake of his Oscar-recognized work on *Indiana Jones* and the *Temple of Doom*, *The Abyss*, *Terminator 2* and *Jurassic Park*, Muren faces one of the toughest assignments of his career: the revamp of *Star Wars*' effects for a "special edition" of the sci-fi classic, to be released in 1996. Fortunately for him, the films he has worked on since *Jedi* have prepared him for this task.

Muren sees this assignment as a tremendous opportunity to do some R&D for the next *Star Wars* trilogy, which Lucas is presently planning. In that sense, it's possible that the revamped original might be as important a groundbreaker as the original. "It might be," Muren agrees, "but not technologically. For *Star Wars*, we developed the technology. There was no motion control. Everybody worked incredibly hard on the original film and did as good as they could for that particular period of time. But it's a different world now and so we should be able to make *Star Wars* a lot different. Now we have this great tool—computer imagery—with which we can do almost anything. We won't be limited in the ways we were on the original *Star Wars*."

But if it's not going to be a technological breakthrough, what can we expect from *Star Wars* in 1996? "It'll be an aesthetic breakthrough," Muren promises, "if there's going to be one. The aesthetics have got to be beyond what anyone has seen before, because the technology is not unique anymore. I hope we don't just redo *Star Wars*. I'd like to take the original film to another level and make the images unique." As unique for the 1990s, that is, as the original was for the 1970s. ♦



TAKE A WALKER: Muren's creatures get finishing touches (above) before being put through their paces. Muren (below with T-Rex) is now master of all he surveys



UNCHECKED

Contagion

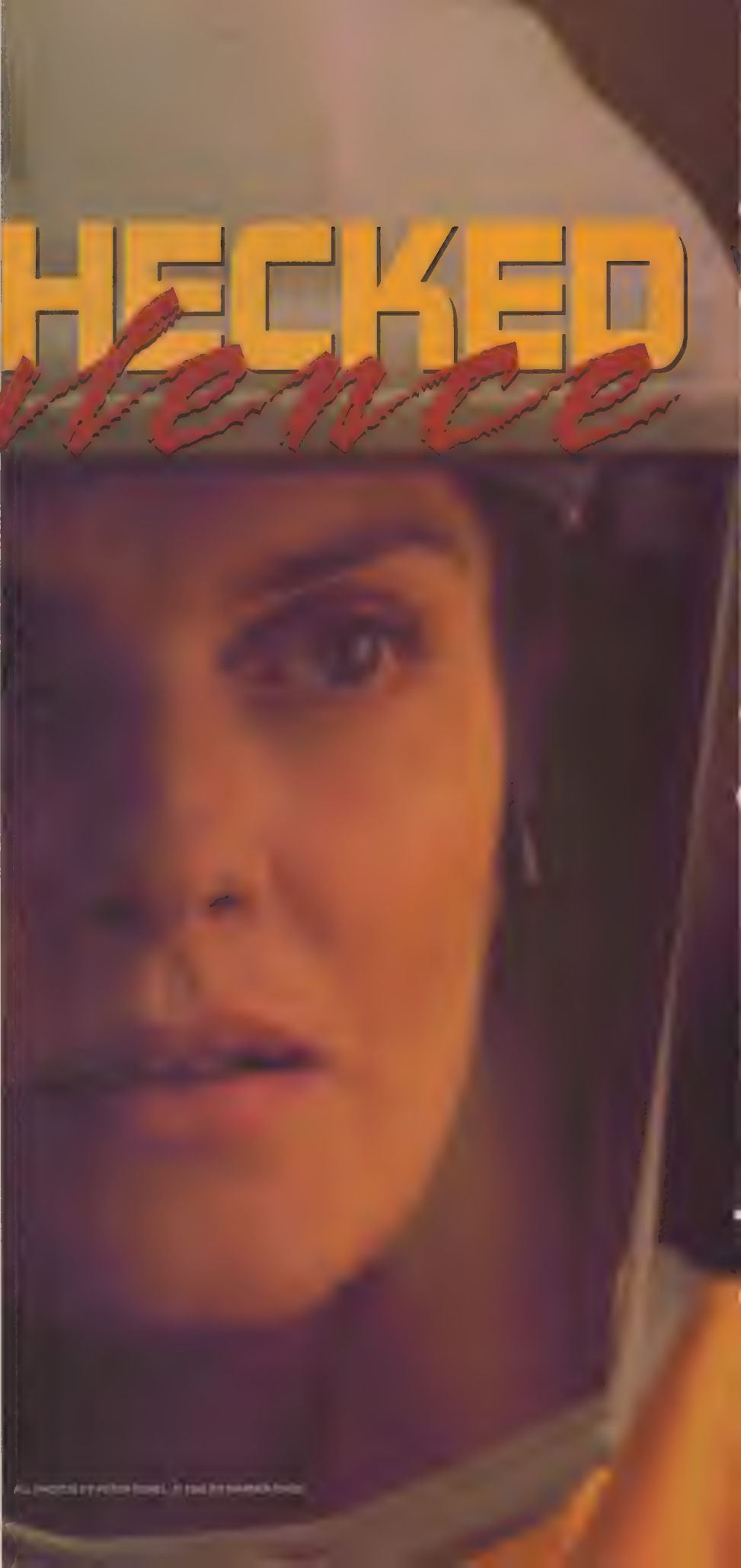
Once under threat of quarantine by Fox's now averted *Crisis in the Hot Zone*, Warner Bros.' *Outbreak* is free to infect the masses.

by Frieda Noone

The tooth-baring beasts of creature features like *Jurassic Park* are pretty terrifying. But even more than any outsize lizards, microscopic monsters can strike profound fear: You can't see them coming. And once they find you, they attack from *within*. A recurring theme in works of science fiction and horror, the threat of epidemiological rampage has made a potent basis for several noteworthy films, including *The Satan Bug* (1965) and *The Andromeda Strain* (1971)—and a merely exploitative one for many others.

As AIDS and other devastating diseases (e.g., the so-called "flesh-eating" bacteria) continued to dominate world headlines, 1994 became a veritable plague year in Hollywood—with no less than three major virus-themed projects making news: ABC's blockbusting miniseries *The Stand*, based on Stephen King's epic novel, held the nation fascinated for nearly a week; Twentieth Century Fox crowed that Ridley Scott would shape Richard Preston's nightmarish *New Yorker* article-turned-nonfiction book, *The Hot Zone*, into a movie starring Robert Redford and Jodie Foster; and Warner Bros. announced its slating of *Outbreak*, an equally high-pedigreed thriller with Dustin Hoffman and Morgan Freeman, from director Wolfgang Petersen (*In the Line of Fire*).

A frantic production race sparked by the similarities between the latter two pro-



jects ended last summer when eleventh-hour cast bail-outs led Fox to withdraw its planned film (see sidebar, page 43)—leaving Warner the winner by default. Due out this month, *Outbreak* opens with Dr. Sam Daniels (Hoffman), a colonel for the United States Army Medical Research Institute for Infectious Diseases, being dispatched to Africa by his commanding officer, Gen. Billy Ford (Freeman), to investigate a viral flare-up that has killed an entire village. Daniels concludes that the bug can potentially spread to the U.S. and warns his superiors to place the country on alert. He also notifies his ex-wife, Dr. Roberta “Robby” Keough (Rene Russo), an employee of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Soon after, Daniels is mysteriously removed from the investigation by Gen. Ford, and Robby’s boss at the CDC refuses to heed her warnings. But then, reports of people in the small community of Cedar Creek, CA, having flu-like symptoms, becoming progressively ill and dying within hours of being infected begin flowing into the agencies. Daniels’ efforts to find a serum that will halt the menace is further hampered by one of the nation’s highest ranking military officers, Gen. McClintock (Donald Sutherland), who aims to contain the problem with a plan as uncompromisingly lethal as the virus itself. Cuba Gooding, Jr., Patrick Dempsey and Kevin Spacey also star in the film, which was written by real-life physicians Laurence Dworet and Robert Roy Pool along with noted scripters Ted Tally (*The Silence of the Lambs*) and Neal Jimenez (*River’s Edge*).

“I recognized that *Outbreak* was an important movie—one that would make people aware of what is happening in the world,” says Academy Award-winning producer Arnold Kopelson (*Platoon*, *The Fugitive*), who developed the project from an original story after reportedly trying and failing to purchase the rights to Richard Preston’s magazine piece. “As we disrupt the delicate ecologies of the tropical rain forests and release viruses that have previously been contained into the larger environment, we run the very real risk of exposing our world to even more catastrophic epidemics. This film explores the worst-case scenario of a rampantly communicable virus infecting an entire community and threatening the country and even the world.”

Kopelson and Wolfgang Petersen’s decision to cast Dustin Hoffman as the story’s strong-willed military officer/messenger may seem odd for those who remember him best for his witty cross-dresser in *Tootsie* and autistic savant in *Rain Man*. “Dustin’s intelligence and passion made him the ideal choice for this part,” says Petersen, who’s reputation for

claustrophobic thrillers was cemented in 1981 with *Das Boot* (*The Boat*). “He is capable of bringing to [this] heroic role a depth of understanding that takes it out of the ordinary and exposes the raw humanity of the character.”

The actor felt the timing was right for the role. “I was looking for a part where I could essentially play myself,” says Hoffman, 57, who won an Oscar for doing just that in the 1979 drama *Kramer vs. Kramer*. “Fortunately, Wolfgang liked the idea of me not doing a character. He asked me to play it as I would in real life rather than in a generic, heroic fashion. So, Sam Daniels became, simply, a human being forced into an heroic situation.”

Hoffman immersed himself in literature on the subject and attended field trips to various laboratories, where he interviewed top experts in the field. “What I learned in my research,” he says, “is that epidemiologists aren’t just researchers or isolated scientists, but detectives. They find out what caused the virus. How did it happen? Who got it first? What did it come from? It’s unnerving to know that there are viruses that have been around for thousands of years that we, as humans, are coming into contact with because we’re invading their space.... These are not new viruses, but they are emerging now because we’re going where maybe we shouldn’t be going. And once we release them, they’ll go out and do their

single job, which is ... to replicate.”

The actor’s quest for knowledge was infectious, if somewhat forcibly so. Co-star Morgan Freeman, for one, found himself becoming a lay expert just from the sheer volume of material Hoffman shared with him. “Every day, Dustin sent me books and articles about disease. Every damn day!” chuckles the affable performer, last seen as the level-headed prison inmate in *The Shawshank Redemption*. “Or, he’d call me at two in the morning, saying, ‘Did you see this? Let me fax it to you.’”

Freeman’s own nearly-four-year military career gave him a good handle on Gen. Ford, if not the conundrum the character must face during the course of *Outbreak*. “Ford is a military man with the task of defending the nation, and that means being able to handle any weapon that your enemy might have. Well, in this instance, the enemy isn’t a conventional force, but a virus. There doesn’t seem to be any conventional way to combat it, so he must resort to that almost robotic programming instilled in him.”

Rene Russo, whose work in *Lethal Weapon 3* helped sow the current crop of young action-genre actresses that includes Sandra Bullock, Yancy Butler and Famke Janssen, resorted to natural human programming to play Robby Keough, who is ultimately stricken. “The challenge was not to be melodramatic with it,” she says. “I feel that when horrible things happen, we’re a lot stronger than we think we are.



WAR ZONE: Rene Russo (opposite page) and Dustin Hoffman battle a killer virus

Something else kicks in."

Russo's clear-eyed approach to the material made her the first choice of Petersen and producer Gail Katz, who had also worked with her on *In the Line of Fire*. "She brought a warmth and moxie to [Fire] that captivated audiences and made her a role model for women," says Katz. "We wanted those same qualities in an actress for Robby."

As for depicting the chilling qualities of the film's virological villain, a fictional strain named Motaba and modeled after the highly communicable—and nearly 100 percent fatal—Ebola virus that appeared in Africa in the early 1980s, the filmmakers hired medical advisor Donna Cline (*And the Band Played On*). Cline, who holds a masters degree in biomedical illustration and is an experienced storyboard artist, was responsible for consulting experts and condensing considerable scientific information into digestible dramatic moments. Although the clinical manifestations of Motaba are more horrific and the incubation period is more com-

pressed, its graphic characteristics won't be too exaggerated: Its airborne mode of transmission, impact upon the human body and resistance to suppression are all seen in currently identified viruses.

Much the same way that the military in *Outbreak* descends upon the fictional hamlet of Cedar Creek, the production's 200-member crew took over the picturesque Northern California town of Ferndale (also, coincidentally, a location used in *The Stand*) for more than three weeks last summer. Morgan Freeman recalls the "invasion" vividly: "We came in with helicopters, trucks, sets, people. I guess the only thing we didn't have were drawn guns!"

A portable bio-safety lab that figures prominently in the film was built at an intersection beside a bank that was modified to look like a hospital, while a tent city was erected in a park. The compound was populated by hundreds of extras—some costumed as doctors, nurses and military personnel, but most in elaborate makeup depicting the facial discoloration,

lesions and caked blood that represent Motaba's insidious progression. A three-chopper helicopter stunt unit staged the climactic chase scene between Daniels and McClintock; close-ups of actors Hoffman and Sutherland were inserted later by way of blue-screen special effects. Additional location work was completed in Pasadena, on a tanker docked at San Pedro, CA, and on the Hawaiian island of Kauai (which stood in for the African rain forest) before filming wrapped in Los Angeles in December.

Producer Kopelson, true to his reputation for tackling message-driven projects, clearly has spared no expense on *Outbreak* in an effort to portray the urgency of the situation. "We are living in a time," he says, "when viruses we never even knew existed a few years ago are now familiar by name, if not by experience. I felt all of the importance of that could be put in a vehicle that would not only be entertaining but educational."

Ah, leave it to the movies to make learning fun. ♦



OUTBREAK HEARTLINE:
Robin Russo is a terrifying
target for the deadly bug





BUGGY OUT: Hoffman battles bureaucrats as well the virus



HOMEBOUND: Hoffman and Russo are all dressed up with nowhere to go

EXTERMINATING *The enemy*

Never mind viruses: In the film business, it's competition that really gets into the blood. So when Twentieth Century Fox and Warner Bros. announced virus-themed movies—*Crisis in the Hot Zone* and *Outbreak*, respectively—almost simultaneously last year, they created one of the most closely watched movie rivalries in recent memory.

The drama took a sudden turn in July when one of the big names in the Fox project, Jodie Foster, walked—citing story problems. As director Ridley Scott scrambled to revise the script, his male lead, Robert Redford, reportedly sought help from screenwriter Paul Attanasio, with whom he had worked on the critical hit *Quiz Show*. But there seemed to be no quick antidote to the aptly-named *Crisis*. And almost faster than you can shrick "cooties," Redford also was out the door—echoing Foster's sentiment.

In the wake of the stunning departures,



EXIT LAUGHING: Foster walked

Fox—despite the \$6 million it had already invested in the estimated \$55 million production—lost all confidence and gave the dazed Scott permission to find another host. But there wasn't a studio that would touch the diseased enterprise with a 10-foot pole. In late August, Scott and producer Mimi Polk finally decided to close shop. "It was a project we wanted to make because we believed very strongly in its script..." they said in a joint statement.

All of this has been a dose of bad serum for Richard Preston, whose shattering *New Yorker* account of the near-catastrophic 1989 outbreak of a rare tropical virus among a group of medical research monkeys in Virginia inspired the canceled film. The 40-year-old author, who received a \$100,000 option from the studio for the rights to the article—which he expanded into a nonfiction bestseller, *The Hot Zone*, last fall—has called *Outbreak* "a high-budget ripoff. My feelings are that my lawyers are going to watch very carefully and see what's going to happen." A reminder that, in Hollywood, legal recourse is still the best remedy. —Dean Lamanna



THE COWGIRL WAY

Director Sam Raimi saddles up with a gunslinging Sharon Stone-and pays homage to Sergio Leone-in his quirky Western, THE QUICK AND THE DEAD

In the early 1960s, when the movie Western seemed to be running in increasingly dusty circles, a stranger rode into the cinema. "The cowboy picture has gotten lost in psychology," declared the not-so-pale rider, Sergio Leone, who spurred its revitalization with a series of brooding, bloody shoot-'em-ups such as *A Fistful of Dollars* and *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. "The West was made by violent, uncomplicated men, and it is this strength and simplicity that I try to recapture in my pictures."

The moviegoing public's respect for the genre has ebbed and flowed in the quarter-century since the late Italian director-screenwriter made those statements, as evidenced by its endless pattern of parody and renewal at the hands of actor-filmmakers like Mel Brooks (*Blazing Saddles*) and Clint Eastwood (*Unforgiven*). In the last two years alone, we've seen a wildly mixed saddle bag of frontier-themed efforts, including *Tombstone*, an okay restaging of the O.K. Corral shootout; *Posse*, a rousing roundup featuring a mostly-black band of cowboys lassoing a racist sheriff; and *Wyatt Earp*, an overblown

biopic that burped sour and knocked Kevin Costner off his high horse.

Now along trots Sam Raimi's *The Quick and the Dead*, both a back-to-basics homage to Leone's work and—in a '90s-style twist—a feminization of it, with Sharon Stone supplanting squinty-eyed Clint Eastwood as the Stetson-capped outsider. "I'm not into remakes," asserts the 35-year-old director, who honed his kinetic visual manner in the horror-fantasy arena (*The Evil Dead* trilogy) and is a founder of the Universal Studios-based Renaissance Pictures (*Hard Target*, *TimeCop*). "But in the current genre cycle, the 'Spaghetti Western,' which was Leone's cheesier, less-classy version of the big studio Western, hasn't really been re-explored. This script really hit upon that, updating it with a female lead and a different set of values."

Taking place over four tense days in 1878, the \$30 million-plus TriStar release opens in classic fashion with Stone arriving on horseback in the fictional Mexican-American border settlement of Redemption—a town ruled by the despotic Herod (*Unforgiven*'s Gene Hackman), a master marksman and outlaw

By Dean Lamanna

who strikes fear in the locals. Ostensibly lured by the prize money for an in-progress gunfight competition, Stone's silent stranger actually is making a bitter, vengeful homecoming: When she was a child, her father, the marshal of Redemption, was killed by Herod, who subsequently installed himself in the dead man's stead. Stone, eventually joining forces with Herod's estranged partner, a downtrodden preacher named Cort (Russell Crowe, last seen as the lead skinhead in the 1992 Australian import *Romper Stomper*), attempts to assassinate Herod and fails—and she is finally forced to face him down in a gunfight.

"It's corny, good-versus-evil stuff," Raimi says, chuckling. "Sharon looks tough: She's got this pearl-handled, silver six-shooter, while Herod's got the black gun. It's not played for laughs, really." The director takes a long breath, then waffles: "It could be. It's right on the edge there."

With formative influences ranging from *Night of the Living Dead* to *The Three Stooges* TV comedies, that teetering tonality has become a hallmark of Raimi's style—which was developed gradually with the numerous Super 8 films he made before and during his short matriculation at Michigan State University. (He dropped out in 1978 after 18 months.) Never a fan

of Westerns as a child, it wasn't until Raimi watched *High Noon* in a college film course that he grew interested in the genre. In 1977, with \$700 and the free acting services of his future producing partner, Rob Tapert, he made his own, 8-millimeter Western, *The Happy Valley Kid*.

"It was the story of an MSU student tormented to the point of madness," Raimi fondly recalls. "His roommate abuses him, his professor hates him, his girlfriend dumps him. He's driven to a fantasy world in which he becomes a Clint Eastwood-type hero, and in which he avenges all the injustices done to him in his more nerdish persona. It's *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* meets student film."

Eighteen years later, *The Quick and the Dead* has replaced the "student film" half of that combination with "commercial movie." Or so its participants hope. In the wake of last year's brothel-breakin' bust *Bad Girls* (a silly chicks-in-chaps actioner that could have been titled *The Wild Bikini Bunch*), it may be easy to dismiss the traditional hero's sex-change in *The Quick and the Dead* as an easy gimmick. But that's a charge its top-billed star—who, according to most reports, shunned any attempt to glamorize her part—has been quick to shoot down. "I think we've pretty permanently established my gender," Sharon Stone told *The Los Angeles Times* last year. Playing a cow-gal, she said, enabled her to "experiment with what that is: What would it be like to be trapped in this situation in the Old West? And because I didn't have to



ONCE UPON A CRIME:
Stone saddles up for revenge



DAPPER DIRECTOR:
Raimi confers with his

"Sharon took to the physicality of spinning her gun very well. She's actually very—um, how do I say it?—great with her hands."

—Sam Raimi



KILLER INSTINCT: Sharon Stone pews down the box-office competition

fit into some agreement of femaleness, I get to really be female."

Of course, as an international box-office star, Stone generally gets to be whatever she wants. And on *The Quick and the Dead*, she also got to be a co-producer with nothing less than director approval: It was, in fact, her decision to hire Raimi. "He was the only person on my list," she has said. "If Sam hadn't made this movie, I don't think I would have made it."

Raimi was pleasantly surprised when he got the call in the spring of 1993. "For some reason Sharon had seen my films," he says, "and I was quite honored to be chosen by her to direct the picture." It was the first he had heard of the screenplay, which was penned by Simon Moore, an Englishman who had planned to direct it himself until producer Joshua Donen got Stone involved. "When I read the script, I felt that it was really great—very exciting, very rich in character," Raimi recalls. "And I was ready to do something different." After several months of preproduction and storyboarding, the film company set up shop in Tucson, AZ, in November 1993 and remained three months—shooting just east of the city in the chilly, high-desert town of Mescal.

Although not generally intimidated by

big actors, the quietly confident Raimi was, at the outset, somewhat daunted by the prospect of directing two-time Oscar winner Gene Hackman, 64—likening the task to "a kid trying to hang onto a kite. I respect his ability so much as an actor," says the director, who was awestruck by Hackman in *The French Connection* (1971), "that I wondered whether or not I would have the intelligence and the insight to work with someone of his caliber." Having managed the situation with little friction or capitula-

tion, is he happy with Hackman's take on Herod? "Gene delivered a performance like I've never seen an actor give before. It's just mind-blowing."

Raimi is similarly impressed with the work turned in by 19-year-old Leonardo DiCaprio (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape*), whose role as the Kid is key to establishing the inherent nastiness of Herod. "The Kid wants to win the gunfight competition more than anything," explains Raimi, "and the reason he does is because Herod is his



THE SON RISES IN THE WEST: No kidding around between DiCaprio and Hackman

Raimi's New Direction

With *The Quick and the Dead*, it appears that Sam Raimi is on the lam from his home genre. And after his last directing experience, it's easy to understand why.

Army of Darkness, his second sequel to *The Evil Dead*—the gory and derivative, though visually inventive, no-budget horror film that broke him into Hollywood 12 years ago—consumed about two years of his life and was one of the biggest flops of 1993. Various (if not always negatively) described as “*Excalibur* meets *The Exorcist*” and “*Jason and the Argonauts* on



acid,” it followed Raimi's successful 1990 comic-book melodrama *Darkman* as his second project for Universal Pictures. Weighed down by the embattled Dino DeLaurentiis as executive producer, *Army* rapidly exhausted its \$11 million budget on a giddy mishmash of pyrotechnic, makeup and puppet FX.

“We discovered that we were going over budget in some areas,” Raimi recalls, “and we couldn't get more financing because of the terms of the deal. But we didn't want to finish the movie without the skeleton battle scenes—even if it meant taking a lot of our own salary to do them.”

The decision ended up costing Raimi and his producing partners Rob Tapert and Bruce Campbell (who also played Ash, the series' cartoonish running character) thousands. “Bit by bit, we just had to dump our money into it. But you work so hard on stuff that the money finally doesn't matter.”

Eroding *Army*'s position further, Universal—and, it seemed, almost every studio in town at the time—wasn't on good terms with DeLaurentiis. “We were caught in the middle, and I don't think that was good for the movie,” Raimi says in hindsight. “No one was supporting it. I don't want to say anything bad about [Universal], because I work for them all the time.... At any rate, I don't think the film ever could have been a big success, because it's kind of a weirdo movie.”

Few will argue with Raimi there. *Army of Darkness* was, in fact, so weird that it had barely marched to the theatrical frontlines when it beat a swift retreat to home video.—DL

father. Herod denies it because he doesn't want any chinks in his armor, and to admit that he cares about a son—or that he even has a son—is, for him, a weak link. But the Kid really wants to be accepted by Herod, so the only way he can gain his father's recognition and respect is by proving he's the best and baddest gunfighter in town. Herod tells him to stand down, but ultimately the competition reaches a point where father and son must face off against each other in a gunfight.”

Raimi won't reveal who wins outright. “Let's just say you definitely want your name above the title in a Western,” he laughs. “It increases your survival chances.”

It was a costly example of tough love for producers Raimi, Sharon Stone and Rob Tapert: They all dipped into their own pockets to cover DiCaprio's acting fee, which exceeded TriStar's allocation for the medium-sized role. (Stone's contribution alone was reported to be \$125,000). “No one had to do that, but I wanted Leonardo,” Raimi says. “The Kid really has to embody a youthful zest for living.... He's trying to be a big man in standing up to Herod, but I still wanted the audience to realize that he was just a little boy. Leonardo is the most talented young actor that I'd ever come across, and I felt that he could really earn the audience's sympathy.”

Stone, apparently saddle-sore from her first experience as a producer, seems to be

trying to earn a little sympathy, too—saying that she was all but excluded from postproduction. “I had to fight and cajole to get to see the picture at all,” she told *Entertainment Weekly* last fall. “I guess I learned a big lesson on that. Starting with, I didn't charge a producer's fee.”

“She must have let her fee go, and my feeling is she should have been paid for any duties she performed,” says Raimi, who's also somewhat puzzled by Stone's claim that she was barred from postproduction. “Maybe that interviewer just caught her at a time when she hadn't been actively involved in the editing process. But actually, in totality, I think Sharon had a lot of input into the final cut, and I hope that she's happy with the picture.”

It's hard to tell where TriStar stands on the project, which was originally targeted for release last summer. According to some reports, the studio wanted a much sexier and more feminine Stone—one in a dress instead of leather pants and a topcoat. Raimi is aware of the stories, but claims that TriStar never broached the subject with him. Besides, he says, Stone wanted to keep the film's Old West grit as true as possible. “She certainly didn't have any problem with the level and intensity of the violence,” he says.

Raimi, who typically wears a tie on the set out of respect for his cast and crew, says working with Stone was nothing short of a



STONE'S BOLD KILLER
...KIDNAPS AWAY



CAST AND GUN In *Twister*, bending gunslinger is joined by DiCaprio, Hackman and Crowe

pleasure. "Sharon loves to get involved in learning the skills that help one create a richer character," he says. "She's very physical: She can kick high, and she can leap and ride horses. She can get up on a horse very quickly, but also *gracefully*. And she took to the physicality of spinning her gun very well."

The 36-year-old actress, who had already demonstrated a *Basic Instinct* for handling lethal weaponry, was a quick study in the art of the quick-draw—sharpening her six-gun form under the tutelage of record-holder Thell Reed. "Thell's literally the fastest gun in the West," says Raimi. "We had him teach all the cast members who had to be good with a gun exactly how to draw, shoot, clean, load, carry one—and really try to achieve a level of proficiency that would imply that they were who they said they were. We wanted to make that very convincing because America is so gun-crazy. It seems like everybody's got a gun, and they would all know if we were faking it."

Hackman, who achieved a draw-and-trigger of 35 hundredths of a second, is

"the fastest on film," according to consultant Reed. But just how convincing is the lady shootist? Raimi stammers: "Sharon's actually very, um—how do I say it?—great with her hands."

The director lauds the handiwork of his behind-the-scenes players as well, especially production designer Patrizia Von Brandenstein (*Ragtime*, *Amadeus*), who says she imagined "predatory birds" when she designed Herod's house—which is perched ominously on a hillside above the town. "The whole film was shot in muted tones, with a lot of contrast to emphasize the sense of good versus evil," says Raimi. "We went for strong backlighting and a lot of black backgrounds to create a very rich texture. Patrizia paid great attention to detail, capturing some of the finery of the period as well as its rough human nature. And she really went with the contrast of Herod having everything and the townspeople having nothing."

Although the film turned out to be less stunt-heavy than he'd expected, Raimi excitedly details its action-packed climax, in which Stone and the preacher level the town with dynamite. "It's a very big explo-

"You definitely want your name above the title in a Western. It increases your survival chances."

—Sam Raimi

sion sequence," he says. "We had stuntmen on ratchet lines being yanked 50 feet in the air, timed with the fireballs. We had guys diving off a clock tower that blows up big time. We had horse carriages ripping through the streets, tumbling end over end like Tonka toys."

Following a short silence, Raimi deadpans: "No horses were harmed. Just ponies. We slaughtered about 16 ponies."

With five years of mainstream filmmaking under his belt—including a costly lesson in studio diplomacy on his last feature directing effort, *Army of Darkness* (see sidebar, opposite page)—Raimi can be pardoned for a little cynical humor. And he can also be forgiven for the occasional urge to take his old 8-millimeter camera out of its mildewed holster. "I love the freedom and simplicity of eight millimeter," he says. "I think you can make the best movies with it. You get to work in all the same areas as a real film—writing, lighting, editing and even sound recording. It offers a whole world of creative possibilities, with none of the hassles of professional filmmaking." He pauses a moment. "And, oh, yeah," he adds with a laugh, "you don't get paid!" ♦

HOLLY START YOUR



WOOD R ENGINES

Temperatures are rising as the summer's would-be blockbusters rev up for the big race. Here's an early reading on what's shaping up to be a record-breaking heat

by the editors of CINESCAPE



Summer is still a few months off, but studio executives are already mopping the sweat from their brows. The reason? More budgetary bucks are on the line than ever before. With a whopping combined production cost of around \$700 million, the coming crunch of big-ticket films can't help but stir images of overloaded high performance cars—and twisted roadside wreckage. Will *Under Siege 2: Dark Territory* seize up? Will *Waterworld* float?

Will *Batman Forever* soar?

Of course, just how hot—or not—these movies and others will be won't become evident until the reels are out and the receipts are in. But based on story concept, casting, early set reports and otherwise informed—if unscientific—prognosticating, here are the current temperature readings (100 equals peak performance) on the season's most competitive vehicles.

APOLLO 13

Entry Fee: \$40 million

Ignition: Even the out-of-this-world adventures of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* cannot compete with the tension and thrill of real-life space flight. At least that's what director Ron Howard (*Backdraft*) promises with the story of the Apollo 13 crew. This

gritty space adventure, starring *Forrest Gump*'s Tom Hanks, chronicles the NASA moon mission that went awry and barely missed disaster.

Fuel for Thought: Though the earlier true-life astronaut pic *The Right Stuff* crashed at the box office in 1983, portending the electoral fate of orbiter-turned-presidential candidate John Glenn, *Apollo 13* has good reason to trust in the stars. It has state-of-the-art special effects, master storyteller Howard at the helm and a first-rate cast (Hanks, Ed Harris, Gary Sinise and Bill Paxton).

Engine Temp: 92°

BATMAN FOREVER

Entry Fee: \$60 million plus

Ignition: Apres Tim Burton, director Joel Schumacher promises to lighten up Warner Bros.' prized franchise—and increase its impressive wing span with a spiffier production design and a colorful parade of supporting players, including Jim Carrey as the Riddler and Chris O'Donnell as the Boy Wonder. Michael Keaton's passing of the cowl to Val Kilmer, a far more versatile and adventurous performer, will create nary a crease in the superhero's famous cape.

Fuel for Thought: With his uncanny ability to turn dross like *Dumb and Dumber* into gold, Carrey alone can carry the picture past the \$100 million threshold. But in this kind of high-class company, the sky's the limit.

Engine Temp: 100

CUTTHROAT ISLAND

Entry Fee: \$75 million

Ignition: Battered by Carolco's rough financial seas and Michael Douglas' abrupt plank-walk last summer, Renny Harlin's ambitious pirate epic was once viewed as a sinking ship. But the studio kept it afloat by selling off another film project (Paul Verhoeven's *Showgirls*), and Harlin quickly tapped Matthew Modine to replace Douglas—a move akin to having Mickey Rooney sub for Robert Shaw in *Jaws*. The movie won't be as bad as Robert Benchley's latter-day buccaneer tale *The Island*, but then, it might not harbor much more substance than Disney's *Pirates of the Caribbean* ride.

Fuel for Thought: Mrs. Harlin, Geena Davis, as a swashbuckling heroine? Aye, aye!

Engine Temp: 58°

DIE HARD 3: WITH A VENGEANCE

Entry Fee: \$40 million plus

Ignition: Having already saved a skyscraper and Dulles Airport from terrorists, what will police officer John McClane (Bruce Willis) do for an encore? Simon Gruber (Jeremy Irons), brother of slain *Die Hard* bad guy Hans Gruber, is seeking vengeance, laughs and financial reward by sending McClane and a wayward pedestrian (Samuel L. Jackson) running around the Big Apple to find strategically placed explosives.

Fuel for thought:

Though the third entry in an action series is usually the toughest to do well, McClane is Willis' most successful role, and the actor is floating on the kudos he garnered for *Pulp Fiction* (as is Jackson).

Engine Temp: 92°

JOHNNY MNEMONIC

Entry Fee: \$30 million

Ignition: William Gibson's oppressive future finally revs up on the big screen. Keanu Reeves, signed and delivered before *Speed* made him a megastar, headlines as a courier carrying secret information in his brain chip.

Fuel for Thought: Multimedia artist Robert Longo is a first-time director—and, to some, a movie-industry dilettante. But Gibson's far-out imagination and Reeves' broad appeal peg this futuristic actioner as *Blade Runner* with box-office power.

Engine Temp: 90°

JUDGE DREDD

Entry Fee: \$50 million

Ignition: Written by the talented team of William Wisher (*Terminator 2*) and Steven de Souza (*Die Hard*), this screen adaptation of the underground comic offers a futuristic Earth ruled by a judge system in which the "judge" also serves as his own jury and executioner. One of these law givers, Judge Dredd (Sylvester Stallone), is framed for murder—and enlists the help of a female judge (Diane Lane) and a computer hacker (Rob Schneider) to clear his name and save Mega City.

Fuel for Thought: Though Savoy Pictures is willing to break the bank to secure Stallone for a future project, the

hideous as Henstridge is sexy, Donaldson will have won significantly more than half the battle.

Engine Temp: 83°

UNDER SIEGE 2: DARK TERRITORY

Entry Fee: \$50 million plus

Ignition: A film whose title aptly describes the activity both before and behind the camera, Steven Seagal's sequel to his 1992 action hit saw the defections of producer Jon Peters and a number of top technicians—reportedly due to the star's voracious ego. Then, just five days before shooting was to begin last fall, Seagal reportedly demanded the ouster of costar

Gary Busey. Hired to play the villain after Busey's forced exit, Eric Bogosian (*Talk Radio*) should add a touch of class—if not stability—to the tumultuous enterprise.

Fuel for Thought:

Seagal's last action opus, *On Deadly Ground*, was just deadly. The recent spate of stories about his divorce from Kelly Le Brock and alleged infidelities with a Beverly Hills optician have not bolstered his appeal.

Engine Temp: 77°

VIRTUOSITY

Entry Fee: \$30 million

Ignition: Director Brett Leonard's last feature, the \$6 million *Lawnmower Man*, grossed more than \$100 million.

Fuel for Thought:

Paramount dropped \$7 million to get Denzel Washington, who has become a hot property

after *Philadelphia* and *The Pelican Brief*. But can the star of the 1991 dud *Ricochet* carry a summer blockbuster without a big-name co-star?

Engine Temp: 68°

WATERWORLD

Entry Fee: \$150 million plus

Ignition: Kevin Reynolds' sputtering production has consumed gallons of cash, as well as all of the patience of Universal's executives.

Fuel for Thought: The pressure to complete the reportedly out-of-control film became unbearable for many crew members, and may have helped sink star Kevin Costner's marriage. And with the disaster of last summer's Wyatt Earp, Costner's name on the marquee is no longer a sure sell.

Engine Temp: 60°



Italian Stallion's presence in an action picture no longer guarantees long lines at the box office.

Engine Temp: 75°

SPECIES

Entry Fee: \$30 million plus

Ignition: *Alien* finally comes to Earth as extraterrestrial and human DNA mix during a lab mishap to form a chameleonlike creature that's bent on propagating itself. Model and first-time actress Natasha Henstridge supplies the monster's human face and figure. Ben Kingsley is the scientist responsible for cleaning up the botched U.S. government science project.

Fuel for Thought: Director Roger Donaldson is better known for political thrillers (*No Way Out*). But if H.R. Giger's design for the creature's flip side is as

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Godzilla Falls

Will a tight leash strangle TriStar's monster?

Far from slowing down in middle age, the legendary Godzilla is still inspiring fear in Hollywood's most battle-scarred veterans. The 40-year-old Japanese monster, who first stomped onto movie screens in 1954, managed to spark an epic battle among Tinseltown's titanic powers last fall.

When Jan De Bont, the Dutch-born director who helmed last summer's surprise blockbuster *Speed*, signed on last year to make a new Godzilla thriller, executives at Sony's TriStar Pictures couldn't contain their glee. "I'm thrilled that Jan has chosen *Godzilla* as his next project," TriStar president Marc Platt told *The Hollywood Reporter*. "His visual style and incredible flair for large-scale action are the perfect match for the film." With dreams of blockbuster ticket sales and merchandising opportunities dancing in their heads, studio execs obviously thought they'd found their own version of the monster smash *Jurassic Park*.

De Bont was just as effusive as the studio suits when the deal was announced. "I grew up watching the *Godzilla* movies," he has said. "There's an incredible human element to it. The way the drama and creatures are

interwoven is unique and this opportunity is very exciting."

The script, penned by *Aladdin* veterans Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio, promised to give the 262-foot behemoth the respect he deserved after four decades as the king of B-grade creature features. An anti-nuclear theme, always a component of the campy Japanese flicks, is part of the new story, but the majority of the script has the towering terror traumatizing Los Angeles and San Francisco in an effort to defend the cities from an alien threat.

To bring the monster to life, the studio enlisted Digital Domain, the FX house responsible for the visual wizardry in *True Lies* and *Interview With the Vampire*. Stan Winston, the FX master who's a partner at Digital Domain along with *Terminator* director James Cameron, came on board to do the animatronics work that would supplement the company's computer-generated effects.

"This is the first film of this magnitude where the lead character, who spends a good deal of time on screen, is virtually 100 percent computer-animated," producer Robert Fried said, adding that the *Jurassic Park*'s dinosaurs were onscreen for only 15 minutes.

But even as De Bont began casting and shooting footage late last fall, ominous rumblings began emanating from the Sony lot. Rumor had it that De Bont wanted \$130 million to do justice to *Godzilla*, with one source close to the director telling *Daily Variety* that "you have to make it an extravaganza to make it stand out from the cheapo Japanese versions."

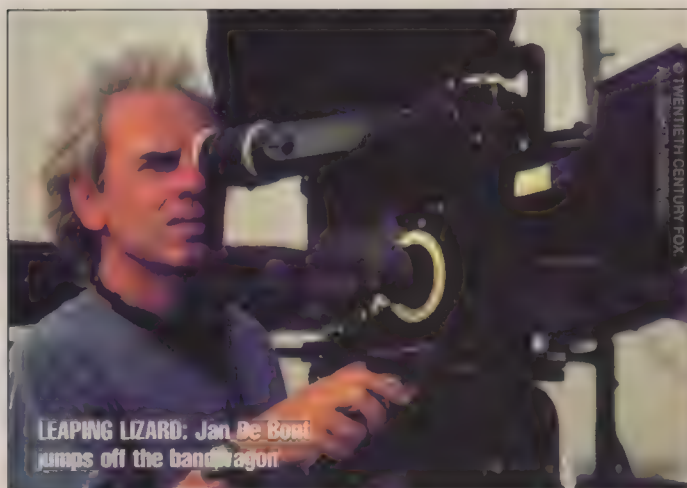
As negotiations with TriStar turned sour, De Bont's camp portrayed the filmmaker as a victim of a studio that had promised absolute freedom and then pulled the reins in on spending. But studio execs, well aware of the problems encountered by troubled megapics like their own *Last Action Hero* and Universal's *Waterworld*, insisted that the project's budget remain under \$100 million.

So De Bont exited the project. But TriStar honchos remained undeterred, announcing that the show would go on. "We are going to make *Godzilla*," one executive said, but "anything over [\$100 million] is too much."

With the studio determined to plow ahead with this effects epic, some insiders wonder if the FX team assembled for the project will be overwhelmed—especially with a restrictive budget. Digital Domain's work has been widely praised, but it was responsible for only 104 of *True Lies*' digital shots and 42 digital shots for *Interview*. *Godzilla* is expected to need a whopping 500 effects shots.

Although the work has been divvied up among Digital, Winston's independent shop and a few other effects houses, that division of labor could create its own ugly problems. "It's hard to believe this is going to work," one source told *The Hollywood Reporter*. "These companies all hate each other!" Without an experienced grand FX maestro on board "who knows how to make 500 shots work together," one insider predicted the project could easily spin out of control. Boyd Shermis, *Godzilla*'s special effects supervisor, has done mostly commercial work in the past and has exactly one feature film credit—*Speed*—to his name. Having so many cooks and no experienced FX chef is "a recipe for disaster" one source said.

Surely that's not what TriStar executives were hoping for when they pressed the lumbering lizard into action. At this point they're probably hoping that the rest of the damage done by their monster ends up on the screen, not on the Hollywood rumor mill. —Mo Ryan





RECOUNTING THE NINE

After two decades in the developmental void, Gene Roddenberry's semi-autobiographical exploration of extraterrestrial life may yet emerge — and reveal some new insights into the man himself

BY DEAN LAMANNA

It's a nice project for the millennium, certainly—though I'd like to get it done before then," says Jon Povill, watching the ocean crash on the beach during lunch at a Santa Monica, CA, hotel. Tall and bearded, with a bass stage voice and a gentle bearing, the fortyish screenwriter is talking about *The Nine*, an as-yet-to-be produced film that promises to go where no one has gone before—deep inside the mind of Gene Roddenberry, creator of *Star Trek*.

The project hasn't left Povill's own mind since the years 1974-79, when he served as an assistant and confidant to Roddenberry and, ultimately, as an associate producer on *Star Trek—The Motion Picture*. Written for hire by Roddenberry and initially revised by Povill in 1975, *The Nine* is a semi-autobiographical account of one man's outer and inner search for evi-

dence of extraterrestrial life. Povill, who has obtained permission to produce the project through his company, Pax-dyne Entertainment, Inc., is currently at work on a new draft of the long-dormant and troubled screenplay that he expects to complete this summer.

"Someone did a study and found that, like, half the population of the world is aware of *Star Trek*," marvels Povill, whose credits include *Star Trek: The Next Generation* ("The Child") and a shared "screen story by" on *Total Recall*. "I don't know how much of that translates specifically to Gene Roddenberry.... It doesn't mean that 3 billion people are going to go out and see this movie!"

One can only hope—as Povill himself did in late 1972, when, about a year out of UCLA's film program, he endeavored to meet the man who launched a thousand

voyages. "I had done one screenplay—an adaptation of 'Ticket to Tranai,' Robert Sheckley's sci-fi story about the subjective nature of paradise—for producer Ron Shusett [*Alien*, *Total Recall*], which I sent to Gene. I later discovered that he'd tell just about anyone that he'd be delighted to read their material, then it would be almost impossible to get him to do it."

Povill phoned Roddenberry at least once a month for an entire year before *Star Trek*'s creator finally read the script. By this time, Roddenberry's post-*Trek* television series efforts—*Genesis II*, its later incarnation *Planet Earth*, and *Questor*—were stalled, and he was writing a novel. Impressed by Povill's work, he offered the aspiring screenwriter a research position for a subastronomical \$50 a week. Nevertheless, says Povill, "it was a great opportunity, and I took it." The stint last-



BACK FROM THE GRAVE:
Roddenberry's book continues

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ed barely two months before Roddenberry shelved the book, but he retained Povill as a handyman for his Beverly Hills home.

With no major deal or project in the works, Roddenberry primarily earned a living by appearing at speaking engagements and conventions and collecting *Star Trek* residuals—though, says Povill, “it really wasn’t adequate for what he was spending.” In 1974, during a convention in New York, Roddenberry agreed to meet an English lord named John Whitmore, the head and principal funding source of a corporation called Lab 9, Ltd. The group, which also included Dr. Andrija Puharich (best known for his discovery of the alleged psychic Uri Geller) and a trance-channeler named Phyllis Schlemmer, wanted Roddenberry to write a screenplay based on the telepathic contact they claimed to have made with the Nine—their moniker for a consortium of nine benevolent extraterrestrials.

“We felt that the communications we were receiving were worthy of wider dissemination,” says the Kent, England-based Whitmore, who studied psychotherapy and physics at, among other places, the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, CA. “We hit on the idea that a fictional film would be a good way to do that, because any kind of documentary would raise controversy and disbelief. That’s why we talked to Gene.”

For the sum of \$50,000, Roddenberry agreed to write and produce the project. “It was Gene’s job to come up with a screenplay that would essentially lay the



ING TIME: Jon Povill (left) confers with director Robert Wise on the set of *Star Trek—The Motion Picture*

groundwork for an [alien] landing or visitation and help prevent a fearful outbreak," explains Povill. But first, Roddenberry was "initiated" by Lab 9 via a coast-to-coast tour of preselected paranormal research facilities—including the group's own center in Ossining, NY, where Phyllis Schlemmer did her channeling under rigorous monitoring.

Although Roddenberry appeared reasonably impressed by the credibility of the demonstrations and experiments he observed on the months-long jaunt, he seemed to have difficulty with the notion of telepathic alien contact. Notes Povill: "Gene was moving toward, 'These are very nice people, they're well-intentioned. But I can't believe for a second that they're in touch with extraterrestrials.'"

FROM NINE TO ... NONE?

Roddenberry's position—or lack thereof—became clear when he turned in his first script draft in late 1975, shortly after setting up an office at Paramount to work on a low-budget feature revival of *Star Trek* (later to become *Star Trek—The Motion Picture*). "Gene just couldn't handle it," says John Whitmore. "He had had all these creative ideas about [extraterrestrial intelligence], but the idea that there might be some reality behind it was very scary to him. And I think that's why he chose his particular format for the story—a sort of autobiographical thing in which he places himself in this kind of quandary, which was not what we wanted. We were looking for a more serious, in-depth examination. Because he was one of the first to present

extraterrestrials in a sort of non-threatening way, I perhaps had a higher expectation."

Povill concurs. "This was a guy whose primary success came from a TV series in which we were going out to seek new life and new civilizations. His stock in trade was *contact* with other civilizations. If anything he should have been predisposed toward believing in the *possibility*."

Disappointed but not quite ready to quit, Lab 9 asked for a rewrite. Roddenberry, in a bit of shrewd subcontracting, gave the task to Povill. "What I didn't know then was that Gene was getting \$25,000 for the rewrite. He gave me \$4,000—which he based on Writers Guild minimums—so he was making a \$21,000 net profit on my work." Still, it was more money that Povill had received for any writing job to date, so he snapped it up.

Besides being cheap and available, Povill says he was sparing Roddenberry the hassle of nurturing a project he apparently didn't believe in. "I suspect that there was no way that he was going to give credence to it—even if he did believe it. I think that he was watchful of the public image and was not about to be labeled a kook. He essentially took the job because he needed the money at the time. I don't think he ever expected to see it get made."

That Roddenberry never really thought the script would reach the screen became obvious to Povill as he settled into the revision. "Gene provided what I felt was a somewhat distasteful insight into himself and his relationship with his wife. I think he was *too* honest in terms of his infidelity; [the script] makes a big thing of him being

impotent and portrays his relationship with his wife as really ugly. Not that Gene didn't have his problems with Majel [Barrett, his spouse]—but I don't think he had to present himself in such an ugly light. I think that he was doing it because, in part, he was trying to create some drama in a script that was largely undramatic. And I think he was also doing it, in a sense, as therapy."

Out of Roddenberry's pseudo-self-exorcism, Povill molded a story of the writer embarking on a deeper soul-search. "I changed the nature of the insight," he says. "I took away some of that self-abasement and tried to focus on the underlying psychological reasons as I saw them. I knew Gene very well at that stage, and I think I had a fairly clear vision of him as a human being. He was certainly flawed: He had many, many wonderful qualities and many really shitty ones."

THE TROUBLE WITH SCRIBBLES

Povill recalls Roddenberry, who died in 1991, as a personality who evoked the most extreme reactions in those he met. "Most who worked with Gene either knuckled under to him and lived with this unswerving loyalty and reverence; or if they maintained their independence, came to dislike him fairly intensely. I did neither of those. Ultimately, I felt tremendous sympathy [and] pity for him. Because here was a man who was intensely unhappy."

As to the roots of Roddenberry's unhappiness, Povill won't speculate. "Gene certainly was a heavy drinker," he says. "But in the script, I [focus on] the

"Look at the number of scripts and themes in *Star Trek* of gods with feet of clay. Gene needed to be revered as a god, and he knew that he was really undeserving"

— Jon Povill

sort of professional things. Here was a man who was not really a writer desperate to prove that he was a writer. He had one success. And when I knew him, he would have killed to have had any success other than *Star Trek* to show that he could create something just as big and wonderful. But he couldn't do it. Professionally, he felt tremendously insecure. And he wasn't terribly well respected by studios or networks or anybody else."

That dearth of industry respect, says Povill, had less to do with Roddenberry's insecurity than with his creative doodles. "A lot of his ideas were crap—and a lot of them were good. For any of us, I think the percentage of good ideas to bad ideas ain't that great. But are you able to look at your own work the next day and say, 'Wow, that was really shit'—and throw it out? Or are you so ego-driven and so desperate to prove that you're right that you can't give it up? Gene couldn't give it up. Whatever he did [his attitude was], *God damn it, I created Star Trek. I know what I'm doing....* There were people who were capable of fighting through the bluff—around whom Gene became as timid as hell. But certainly with underlings such as myself, he would maintain the pose."

As time went on, according to Povill, "the more Gene became revered as a god

by fandom, the more this sort of duality worked. And it reflected in his work. Look at the number of scripts and themes in *Star Trek* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* of gods with feet of clay.... He was a man who needed to be revered as a god, and he knew in his heart that he was tremendously undeserving of it."

How, then, did Roddenberry really feel about his fans? "I think it depended on the day," says Povill, after an extended pause. "I think there were times when he had a genuine affection for his fans; I think there were times that he totally disrespected them. Gene always treated them cordially. When he went to conventions he would hang out with them. But again, I think he needed that love. He needed to feel like people ... respected him, held him in awe. He would always keep people around—including myself, early on—who would show that awe. It was an unhealthy ego."

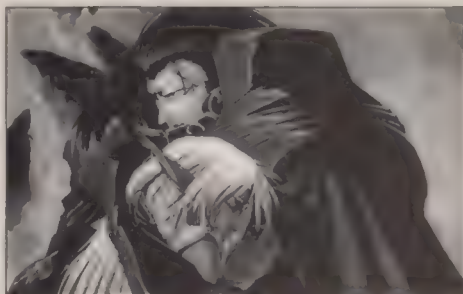
RE-ESTABLISHING CONTACT

Unhealthy or not, that ego was so ingrained in Roddenberry's screenplay for *The Nine* that, despite Povill's best rewriting efforts, it was all but impossible to surmount. Lab 9 was dissatisfied with the results, and the window of opportunity for a visitation by the extraterrestrials appar-

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ently soon passed.

"My suspicion is that the Nine, assuming they're real, were working in other ways as well," Povill says. "And it wouldn't surprise me if some of what Steven Spielberg was doing was also Nine-inspired." *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*—both of which appeared shortly after *The Nine* fell through and which featured aliens communicating telepathically with humans—"would be very much within the spirit of the project and of the consortium." He adds with a laugh: "Certainly, if I were the Nine, I wouldn't have counted just on Gene!"

In the 20 years since, most of the members of the once-close-knit Lab 9 have gone their own ways. Yet contacts with the Nine have continued, according to John Whitmore. "They are less frequent now than they were when we were all together in New York," he acknowledges. "But [Lab 9's] central members do gather in different countries from time to time to involve ourselves in the communications."

Three years ago, Povill, who never lost faith in the script's potential, obtained authorization from Lab 9 (which still owns the rights) to resurrect and produce *The Nine*. But a series of personal setbacks sent the project into limbo again. This time around, with the help of his wife, Michele, a former radio advertising manager, he's planning to pursue corporate funding for the film, which he estimates will cost \$10 million. Whitmore and Phyllis Schlemmer will stay on as executive producers, while Roddenberry will receive a posthumous co-screenwriting credit. Roddenberry's estate—which has no say in the project—will be entitled

"Gene would have killed to have had any success other than *Star Trek* to show that he could create something just as big and wonderful."

— Jon Povill

to a profit percentage.

Although he feels that *The Nine* contains enough selling points to attract a studio, Povill is cautious about involving a major film company. "I know the development people would want, for example, to portray the Nine as menacing early on: 'Let's build some tension by making them seem like a bad bunch.' I want to minimize that. I want that sense of menace to be something that's in Gene's mind. The whole point of the story is that we need to get out of a fear-driven motivation. And I think, in particular, that *Star Trek* fans would want to see the film if it were true

to its intent of altering a fear-driven society to one that strives for inner peace."

Boosting its appeal further would be the possible participation of old *Star Trek* players like Walter Koenig, Jimmy Doohan and George Takei—with whom Povill says he is still friendly. Alas, it wasn't the same with his mentor once the making of *Star Trek—The Motion Picture* got under way in the late '70s. "Gene was constantly pumping out ideas and concepts that he wanted in the movie, and he expected my support on all of them," recalls Povill. "I supported like mad the 20 percent of his ideas that I thought were right, and I opposed the 80 percent I thought were wrong. That, to Gene, was an act of intense disloyalty. We were never close thereafter—just cordial."

Nevertheless, Povill—who can't conceive that there are *not* extraterrestrials—believes that he's been "passed the torch." And he is determined to keep the project's flame alive until it sees the perpetual flicker of the projector bulb. But does he suspect that an actual visitation is near?

"It may be that we have a lot to learn yet," he says, "because I think the essential thing we need for a visitation is exactly what I'm trying to do in *The Nine*. If we are going to be visited, we've got to be in a place where we can feel our own power sufficiently to not feel threatened. Feel our own power sufficiently to not just understand rationally that, *Yeah, these extraterrestrials could have destroyed us, and therefore they're benevolent*—but to feel that inside and to feel protected by it. And I think that the aliens' discretion is largely based on that—on knowing that that's where we've got to get to before we are ready, *really* ready, for contact." ♦

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TREKSCAPE





KILLER CRUDE

...or how an oil spill
murdered Tasha Yar

By Edward Gross

In the original *Star Trek* when Kirk, Spock, Bones and some nondescript officer in a red shirt beam down to the surface of an alien planet, viewers know that the unknown guy in the red shirt will inevitably be dead before Shatner intones his weekly introduction: "Space ... the final frontier."

So when he launched *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Gene Roddenberry decided to shake up viewers by showing them that even the regular cast members weren't necessarily safe. During the first season, actress Denise Crosby, who portrayed security chief Tasha Yar, asked to be released from her contract so she could explore other career opportunities. And Roddenberry and Paramount gave her the OK—after she agreed to play her death scene. According to Hannah Louise Shearer, a former staff writer, Gene Roddenberry became fascinated with showing sudden death as a Starfleet officer might face it. One script on the table fit perfectly with Roddenberry's objective: "Skin of Evil." But Tasha Yar would not go easily, as "Skin of Evil" proved to be one of

the more contentious scripts to be produced for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

In the episode, a shuttlecraft containing Deanna Troi crash-lands on an unexplored planet. An Enterprise Away Team beams down to retrieve her and is confronted by what can only be described as a sentient oil-slick, which is called Armus. This malevolent creature, which can rise from an oil blob to a six-foot-tall figure, was abandoned by its race and has spent years alone on this desolate planet. As a result, the bitter black puddle now takes great pleasure in destroying anyone with whom it comes into contact, which results in the death of Tasha Yar. Now the crew has to figure out how it can rescue Troi while avoiding the creature's lethal touch. The episode concludes with Picard tricking Armus, followed by an onboard funeral service for Yar in which a holographic projection of the security officer bids farewell to each member of the crew.

Writer Joseph Stefano, veteran of *The Outer Limits* and *Psycho*, wrote the first draft of "Skin of Evil," then known as "Tour De Force." But Stefano wasn't pleased with



the editing process at *Star Trek* and when asked about it, he said, "I don't think I've ever said this before in response to a journalist: no comment."

Given Stefano's first-rate reputation, Roddenberry was surprised to find that the script—in which the oil slick makes Geordi tap dance for its pleasure and has Dr. Crusher kiss Geordi's feet—just didn't play well.

In November of 1987, Roddenberry diplomatically wrote to Stefano, "Other than admiring your literacy and writing style, my comments on your first draft script pretty much duplicate the ones from our writing and production people, which judge your script in this draft as so unrelentingly negative emotionally that it doesn't offer the quality of entertainment the audience expects of our series. Not that this isn't fixable. As you said you'd do, you tried to give us something different from run-of-the-mill *Star Trek* scripts, and indeed you've man-

aged that—but in becoming too different, it lost some things that have always been vital to the success of the *Star Trek* format. If anything characterizes our show, both the original and this one, it is a positive look at the human enigma spiced with a bit of humor, some speculation about 'truth,' a bit of moralizing, a bit of hope, combined into an episode which sends most of the audience off to bed feeling good about themselves and their life form. This is not to say that every episode must do every one of these things. As I told you at the beginning, I hope to find stories that keep us from

does? What is it after? What turns it around at the end?... With respect to the physical aspects of this episode, we're going to have to come up with another approach to this antagonist because we'd need weeks of design and construction time and many days worth of shooting time to make it work as written. We don't have that kind of time and we don't have the bucks either."

Justman's suggestion was that the character of Q (seen during the first season in "Encounter at Farpoint" and "Hide & Q") replace the oil-slick. "The 'Slick' is a fascinating character," he admitted. "It's fascinat-



falling into some kind of 'approved' rut. In the case of "Tour De Force" [however] ... we make use of almost none of these tried and true strengths...."

Equally disappointed, producer Herb Wright wrote to Roddenberry: "Given Mr. Stefano's credits, I thought this would be nothing short of a *Star Trek* masterpiece ... rough in first draft perhaps, but a diamond only in need of polish.... Apparently this whole story rests on the premise that the Enterprise has lost a shuttlecraft with Wesley and Troi, and some non-regular crewmen.... And on this planetoid (which came from...?) there is an oily 'slick' which calls itself a 'slime', and which speaks in 20th-century slang as it slithers, ingests, egests, toys with and tortures our Away Team for four plus acts ... as they helplessly attempt (not really) to rescue any survivors of the lost craft. And we never know what, who or why this 'slick' has done anything it's done [or] why our Away Team didn't blast it away, why our Team just didn't beam away at many points of the plot, why we didn't just beam our survivors up sans Away expedition.... Gene, I'm burning my *Psycho* video tape in the morning, in mourning."

Robert Justman, who supervised physical production of *ST:TNG* during its first season, agreed, writing in a production memo: "What's the premise? What makes this slime-thing work? Why does it do what it

ing because, despite its alien appearance, it contains some of the worst attributes of humanity—and Joe has given it some great lines. If we could find an approach that would give us a different alien appearance (without exceeding the national debt), we'd be a lot better off.... The 'Slime' reminds me of Q. The difference here other than physical appearance, is that the 'Slime' is more devilish and has better lines. Could we possibly consider making this the third and last Q episode of this first season—his parting shot before next year?"

Q didn't make an appearance, as Hannah Louise Shearer was tapped to rewrite the script and decided to keep the "Slime" as a counterpoint to the heady moral world of Roddenberry's *Star Trek*. "This character he created of pure evil was tough," she admits. "I got sick when I rewrote that script, because it was very difficult to deal with a creature of pure evil. Gene and I had agreed that the crew of the Enterprise has no right to make a judgment about other creatures out there and kill indiscriminately because of what they do. The job was to make the character of Annus believably evil and give it a basis for its horribleness. Not to destroy it, but to sentence it to a kind of bad karma that it deserves."

"I don't remember who came up with the idea of the hologram at the end of the show, but I ended up writing it," she contin-

ues. "Writing it was a great catharsis; I had a wonderful opportunity to identify with these characters. The most important thing was to get the emotions. An opportunity to kill a main character in a series doesn't come along very often, and it was something I relished. I wanted to deal with how her death affects those around her."

Supervising producer Maurice Hurley recalls that episode. "Infinite problems," he moans. "I think the biggest problem was the slime creature. If he had been better, if we had been able to really do that, it would have taken three or six weeks. It just looked like what it was. It was too ambitious. When we tried to do creatures, horror show stuff, it fell apart; just fell on its ass. You just can't make that stuff work in the time available. You can't do *Aliens* on *Star Trek*."

Setting aside the various complications, director Joseph Scanlan says he enjoyed the script's intellectual quality, especially Armus' innate sense of irony. Added to this was a one-on-one face-off between the creature and Picard, which he enthusiastically directed. Despite these favorable aspects, he was concerned about the viability of the script as an entertainment vehicle.

"When I was talking to the producers," Scanlan explains, "I said, 'If we don't make this monster believable, we are in deep water.... It was important that we not have the audience feel sorry for him when it's over, but I would guess that if you and I took a poll, half the audience would feel great empathy for him. The poor guy is there in this little puddle and that's that. I think the producers really wanted him to be so evil that you'd say, 'Leave him there. Screw him,' but of course it never happened that way. There was no way to avoid empathy for him, which led to the irony of the situation. He killed Tasha, he damn near killed Riker, and I still wasn't mad at him. Look at what his people had done. How could you not feel sorry for him?'"

While this element plagued the director throughout most of the episode's shooting, more problematic was the actual design of the creature, which could transform from a puddle to a human-like figure.

"What the special effects department was going to do," he says, "was create an eight or ten-inch scale model of the figure. They'd put him on a hot plate, shoot it and melt it, and then reverse print that so that when he stood up, he absorbed all of the blackness and there was nothing left on the ground. The downside is that any time you wanted to shoot the figure, we would have to shoot this ten-inch thing in whatever artificial set we could create. Very difficult to do and tie in with the actors. I'm capsulizing a bit, because I never had so many special

effects meetings in my life. Does he have a head? Is there a clearly defined neck and shoulders, or does it all slope off? Is he drippy and gooey, as if the oil never ceases to run? There are a million possibilities.

"Anyway," he continues, we finally settled on building a ten-foot oil pit in the studio floor. Ten feet deep by about six feet in length ... about the size of a grave. One side of it went all the way down, and the other side had a hydraulic platform that went down about halfway so that the stunt guy could stand on it, full figure, on the surface of the planet, be reduced to about waist high and then, through his own ingenuity, submerge himself even further, either by crouching down or stepping off the platform and further into the abyss."

Despite all the preparation, he doesn't believe that the effect was pulled off well.

"If we had a \$4 million budget, we could've pulled off a very intelligent piece of work," he says. "But to do it in seven days is very tough. My first cut was just barely adequate and it took input from the producers to make it better. I had always wanted a Roddy McDowall-type of venomous evil coming out of the mouth of this guy, but the producers leaned more toward what you got, which was the throaty presence. The bottom line is that it became a caricature, and as a result, as close as it came to being a good show, it was not a good show."

Though most of those involved with the show consider it an unsuccessful effort, "Skin of Evil" is nevertheless a memorable TNG episode—perhaps because the popular Tasha was killed and because it returned the more cerebral TNG to the silly, but endearing kind of effects that populated the original series. ★



SLICK VILLAIN: Dr. Beverly Crusher and Tasha Yar survive the alien menace

MOVIESCAPE

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEWS OF MOVIES IN DEVELOPMENT

Destination Known

Constantin's The Stars My Destination attracts a young Kombat-ready director

It shouldn't be difficult for Constantin Films to snare A-list acting talent for *The Stars My Destination* now that a top-notch writing and directing team has been assembled for the film.

The script for the futuristic revenge tale, based on a book by Alfred Bester, was penned by David Giler (*Aliens*, *Alien 3*) and William Wisher (*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *Judge Dredd*). "They're a couple of the best screenwriters working in the States right now," enthuses director Paul Anderson, who's currently readying the much-anticipated *Mortal Kombat* for May release.

Anderson describes *Destination* as a "classic Shakespearian tale" set against a dazzling array of otherworldly locales. "It's about a guy who was left for dead aboard a space ship, left alone in desolation, [who] seeks revenge against those who abandoned him," says the 29-year-old British filmmaker. The quest takes the hero, Gully Foyle, on a journey to several exotic worlds, each of which will give FX artists a chance to create fantastic alien vistas and creatures.

But Anderson says the characters and the intimate feel of the movie won't be overshadowed by the spectacular effects. "If you don't care about the characters, it doesn't matter how much money you throw up there on the screen. I remember seeing Han Solo in



Star Wars and thinking, 'That guy's cool, I want to be like him.' But when I saw *Demolition Man*, I didn't care what happened to those people," despite the film's impressive special effects, Anderson says.

Without giving away the ending, the director says that by the end of his journey, Foyle has been transformed from a "brute" into a "civilized man." Unlike most action epics in which the hero gloriously destroys those who have wronged him, Foyle realizes that revenge is not sweet. Foyle's relationship with his love interest, a con artist named Jiz, is also ambivalent. "With so many movies, when the man and the woman meet, you know that they're going to go to bed 15 minutes later in the film," Anderson says. But *Destination* isn't a typical love story, because each character is constantly wary of betrayal by the other.

Destination's producers, whose first feature will be the upcoming *Fantastic Four*, say they are looking for A-level talent for the project. Harrison Ford, star of the similarly futuristic *Blade Runner*, comes to mind as an obvious choice, but it's unlikely Constantin will be able to snare him. Ford has a busy schedule ahead of him this year, including a remake of *Sabrina* and a new Indiana Jones picture.

Those who want to scope out Anderson's work can either catch *Mortal Kombat* when it comes out this May or see the filmmaker's first feature, *Shopping*, when it's released this summer. A *Mad Max*-meets-A *Clockwork Orange* vision of urban hell, the film's title refers to a new crime trend in Europe: Thugs steal high-performance cars, ram them into stores, pick up a few things and then speed away. —Mo Ryan

ALIEN 4

THE PLAYERS: T.B.D.

THE PLOT: Speed scripper Joss Whedon contemplates the repercussions of bringing Ellen Ripley back from the dead.

THE DIRECTOR: F.B.D.

DISTRIBUTOR: 20th Century Fox

RELEASE DATE: F.B.D.

APOLLO 13

THE PLAYERS: Tom Hanks, Kevin

Bacon, Bill Paxton, Gary Sinise

THE PLOT: The true story of the near-catastrophic moon landing of Apollo 13.

THE DIRECTOR: Ron Howard

DISTRIBUTOR: Universal

RELEASE DATE: June

ASSASSINS

THE PLAYERS: Sean Connery

THE PLOT: Sylvester Stallone is reportedly interested in this project, in which an aging hitman is pursued by a younger rival.

THE DIRECTOR: Richard Donner

DISTRIBUTOR: Universal

RELEASE DATE: F.B.D.

BATMAN FOREVER

THE PLAYERS: Val Kilmer, Tommy Lee Jones, Jim Carrey, Nicole Kidman, Drew Barrymore, Debi Mazar

THE PLOT: Riddle me this: with a s-s-smokin' Carrey and a pumped-up Kilmer, how can the third Bat-installment go wrong?

THE DIRECTOR: Joel Schumacher

DISTRIBUTOR: Warner Bros.

RELEASE DATE: Summer





HUNTER'S PREY
Holly Hunter in *Copycat*

Braveheart

THE PLAYERS: Mel Gibson
THE PLOT: Mad Max discovers chivalry in this \$35 million medieval action epic, which is set in 13th-century Scotland.
THE DIRECTOR: Mel Gibson
DISTRIBUTOR: Paramount
RELEASE DATE: Summer

Gasper

THE PLAYERS: Christina Ricci, Cathy Moriarty, Bill Pullman
THE PLOT: Everybody's favorite friendly ghost floats across the big screen.
THE DIRECTOR: Brad Silberling
DISTRIBUTOR: Universal
RELEASE DATE: May

Congo

THE PLAYERS: Dylan Walsh, Ernie Hudson, Laura Linney, Tim Curry
THE PLOT: Technicians in the jungles of the Congo unwittingly stumble upon a dangerous new breed of gorilla.
THE DIRECTOR: Frank Marshall
DISTRIBUTOR: Paramount
RELEASE DATE: June

Contact

THE PLAYERS: Jodie Foster
THE PLOT: In this film, based on a Carl Sagan book, Foster plays a scientist who makes extraterrestrial contact via radio.
THE DIRECTOR: George Miller
DISTRIBUTOR: Warner Bros.
RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

Copycat

THE PLAYERS: Sigourney Weaver, Holly Hunter, Harry Connick, Jr.
THE PLOT: A cop enlists the help of an agoraphobic professor to track down serial killer Connick.
THE DIRECTOR: John Amiel
DISTRIBUTOR: Warner Bros.
RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

Crimson Tide

THE PLAYERS: Gene Hackman, Denzel Washington, Matt Craven
THE PLOT: Mutiny and mayhem aboard a submarine.
THE DIRECTOR: Tony Scott
DISTRIBUTOR: Hollywood Pictures
RELEASE DATE: May

Crusade

THE PLAYERS: Arnold Schwarzenegger
THE PLOT: Arnold Schwarzenegger is using his considerable muscle to get this 11th-century adventure epic made.
THE DIRECTOR: T.B.D.
DISTRIBUTOR: T.B.D.
RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

Cutthroat Island

THE PLAYERS: Geena Davis, Matthew Modine, Frank Langella
THE PLOT: Despite an ocean of financial woes, this female pirate epic has finally set sail.
THE DIRECTOR: Renny Harlin
DISTRIBUTOR: MGM/UA
RELEASE DATE: Summer

The Dam

THE PLAYERS: T.B.D.
THE PLOT: A *Cliffhanger* sequel set on the Hoover Dam. Tristar plans to go ahead with this film with or without Stallone.
THE DIRECTOR: T.B.D.
DISTRIBUTOR: TriStar
RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

Desperado

THE PLAYERS: Antonio Banderas, Joaquim De Almeida
THE PLOT: A bigger-budget sequel to the \$7,000 shoot-'em-up *El Mariachi*.
THE DIRECTOR: Robert Rodriguez
DISTRIBUTOR: Columbia
RELEASE DATE: August

Die Hard: With a Vengeance

THE PLAYERS: Bruce Willis, Samuel L. Jackson, Jeremy Irons
THE PLOT: Working-class hero John McClane takes a bite out of the Big Apple—and spits out its criminal core.
THE DIRECTOR: John McTiernan
DISTRIBUTOR: 20th Century Fox
RELEASE DATE: May

Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde

THE PLAYERS: Sean Young, Tim Daly, Harvey Fierstein
THE PLOT: A comedic twist on the horror story, with Young baring her Hyde.
THE DIRECTOR: David F. Price
DISTRIBUTOR: Starz
RELEASE DATE: April

CINESCAPE

STEVE RAILSBACK

It takes a skilled performer to make a movie murder memorable. Take, for instance, Steve Railsback, who played Charles Manson in *Helter Skelter*—the brilliant 1976 telefilm about the cult leader's infamous homicide trial. "People still talk about the dies," recalls the 41-year-old actor. "The exposure was enormous."

But it had a downside: Railsback's excellent everyman role in town. Refusing to be pigeonholed, he accepted a series of diverse and artistically satisfying parts that culminated in 1980 with *The Stunt Man*. Richard Rush's critically hailed black comedy about a crook (Railsback) who finds himself at the whim of a Christ-like movie director (Peter



Dinklage). "It was around the final exposure that I realized I was the Administrator." The two words just so happened to be interesting because we knew that something creative was going to happen.

Nothing more, as creating really is your husband's responsibility. And following up on that is your responsibility. I think it's important to be honest. John Hughes will get famous after *100 Women*. That's a good thing for a man. I think it's important to be honest. The one word is honesty. And I think it's important to be honest. It really is a word with me." He says with a laugh.

The apparently comic director says, meeting at a presser's round with Steve Railsback had reached previously after getting out about 10 years. He wanted to be a writer. He thought, "I think of the film, which has to be a more personal testimony to the fact. And, with a friend's help, you can make it. I think it's important to be honest. It really is a word with me." He says with a laugh.

"I think it's important to be honest. It really is a word with me." He says with a laugh. "I think it's important to be honest. It really is a word with me." He says with a laugh.

DRAGONHEART

THE PLAYERS: Dennis Quaid, Sean Connery (as the dragon's voice)

THE PLOT: A knight enlists the help of an old enemy, an 18-foot dragon generated by computer graphics.

THE DIRECTOR: Rob Cohen

DISTRIBUTOR: Universal

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

FIRST KNIGHT

THE PLAYERS: Sean Connery, Richard Gere, Julia Ormond

THE PLOT: Connery takes on the legend of King Arthur, with Richard Gere along as Lancelot.

THE DIRECTOR: Jerry Zucker

DISTRIBUTOR: Columbia

RELEASE DATE: May

GODZILLA

THE PLAYERS: T.B.D.

THE PLOT: TriStar is stomping forth with its \$100 million monster epic, despite the defection of *Speed* director Jan De Bont.

THE DIRECTOR: T.B.D.

DISTRIBUTOR: TriStar

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

GOLDENEYE

THE PLAYERS: Pierce Brosnan, Famke Janssen

THE PLOT: Bond is back, this time with Brosnan as 007.

THE DIRECTOR: Martin Campbell

DISTRIBUTOR: MGM/UA

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

HACKERS

THE PLAYERS: Lorraine Bracco

THE PLOT: A group of teenaged computer pranksters find themselves embroiled in a dangerous industrial espionage plot.

THE DIRECTOR: Iain Softley

DISTRIBUTOR: MGM/UA

RELEASE DATE: August

INDIANA JONES 4

THE PLAYERS: Harrison Ford

THE PLOT: The adventurous archeologist's fourth outing will get under way this summer.

THE DIRECTOR: Steven Spielberg

DISTRIBUTOR: Paramount

RELEASE DATE: 1996

IRON EAGLE 4

THE PLAYERS: Louis Gossett, Jr. and Al Waxman

THE PLOT: Yet another *Iron* supplement for those who can't get enough of Louis Gossett, Jr.'s airborne adventures.

THE DIRECTOR: Sidney Furie

DISTRIBUTOR: T.B.D.

RELEASE DATE: Summer

THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU

THE PLAYERS: Marlon Brando

THE PLOT: The third big-screen version of the classic H.G. Wells horror story about a crazed scientist's grisly genetic experiments.

THE DIRECTOR: Richard Stanley

DISTRIBUTOR: New Line

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

JOHNNY MNEMONIC

THE PLAYERS: Keanu Reeves, Dolph Lundgren, Ice-T, Henry Rollins

THE PLOT: The long-awaited screen adaptation of William Gibson's cyberthriller.

THE DIRECTOR: Robert Longo

DISTRIBUTOR: TriStar

RELEASE DATE: June

JUDGE DREDD

THE PLAYERS: Sylvester Stallone, Armand Assante, Diane Lane

THE PLOT: Based on the popular U.K. comic about a bloodthirsty law avenger.

THE DIRECTOR: Danny Cannon

DISTRIBUTOR: Buena Vista

RELEASE DATE: June

JUMANJI

THE PLAYERS: Robin Williams,

Bonnie Hunt, Kirsten Dunst

THE PLOT: Magical monsters infiltrate a quiet town.

THE DIRECTOR: Joe Johnson

DISTRIBUTOR: TriStar

RELEASE DATE: November

MARY REILLY

THE PLAYERS: Julia Roberts

THE PLOT: Julia Roberts does double duty as the maid to both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in this horror-thriller.

THE DIRECTOR: Stephen Frears

DISTRIBUTOR: TriStar

RELEASE DATE: July

MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS

THE PLAYERS: David Harold Yost, Amy Jo Johnson

THE PLOT: Enough said.

THE DIRECTOR: Bryan Spicer

DISTRIBUTOR: 20th Century Fox

RELEASE DATE: July

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

THE PLAYERS: Tom Cruise, Emmanuelle Beart

THE PLOT: The popular 1960s TV show about a group of specialized government agents hits the big screen.

THE DIRECTOR: Brian De Palma

DISTRIBUTOR: Paramount

RELEASE DATE: November

THE MONEY TRAIN

THE PLAYERS: Woody Harrelson, Wesley Snipes

THE PLOT: Two New York City transit cops find themselves in the middle of a subway heist.

THE DIRECTOR: Joe Ruben

DISTRIBUTOR: Columbia

RELEASE DATE: November

MORTAL KOMBAT

THE PLAYERS: Christopher Lambert

THE PLOT: *Highlander*'s Lambert leads the MK gang in their first theatrical assault.

THE DIRECTOR: Paul Anderson

DISTRIBUTOR: New Line

RELEASE DATE: May

THE NET

THE PLAYERS: Sandra Bullock

THE PLOT: An agoraphobic computer nerd is pursued by government assassins after stumbling onto on-line secrets.

THE DIRECTOR: Irwin Winkler

DISTRIBUTOR: Columbia

RELEASE DATE: Fall



WITH A CHASER
Woody goes on the farm again

PANTHER

THE PLAYERS: Mario Van Peebles

THE PLOT: Van Peebles is an acting/directing double-threat in this action-thriller.

THE DIRECTOR: Mario Van Peebles

DISTRIBUTOR: Gramercy

RELEASE DATE: April

THE PHANTOM

THE PLAYERS: Billy Zane

THE PLOT: From the syndicated comic, "the ghost that walks."

THE DIRECTOR: Joe Dante

DISTRIBUTOR: Paramount

RELEASE DATE: November

ROB ROY

THE PLAYERS: Liam Neeson, Jessica Lange, Tim Roth, Eric Stoltz

THE PLOT: Liam Neeson stars in this historical actioner as a swashbuckling Scottish nobleman.

THE DIRECTOR: Michael Caton-Jones

DISTRIBUTOR: MGM/UA

RELEASE DATE: July

THE ROYAL WAY

THE PLAYERS: Kiefer Sutherland, Richard Harris

THE PLOT: Intrigue and tribal warfare in 1920s Southeast Asia. Based on a novel by French writer Andre Malraux.

THE DIRECTOR: Andrei Konchalovsky

DISTRIBUTOR: Miramax

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

THE SAINT

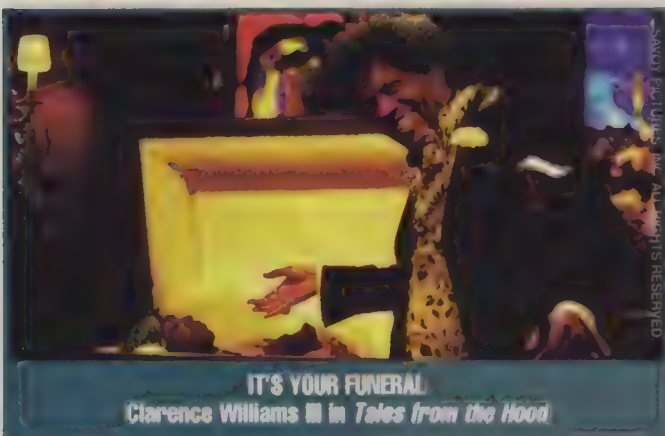
THE PLAYERS: T.B.D.

THE PLOT: The 1960s TV series about Simon Templar, the dashing Robin Hood of crooks, goes before the cameras.

THE DIRECTOR: Renny Harlin

DISTRIBUTOR: Paramount

RELEASE DATE: December



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SEVEN

THE PLAYERS: Brad Pitt, Morgan Freeman

THE PLOT: Will this thriller be Pitt and Freeman's lucky number? We'll see.

THE DIRECTOR: David Fincher

DISTRIBUTOR: New Line

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

SPECIES

THE PLAYERS: Ben Kingsley, Michael Madsen, Forest Whitaker

THE PLOT: An encoded message from space gives scientists the DNA blueprints to create a horrific monster. Alien designs by Swiss artist H. R. Giger.

THE DIRECTOR: Ronald Donaldson

DISTRIBUTOR: MGM/UA

RELEASE DATE: June

STAR WARS (Episode 1)

THE PLAYERS: T.B.D.

THE PLOT: Lucas takes us to the beginning, when Anakin Skywalker's conversion to the Dark Side begins.

THE DIRECTOR: T.B.D.

DISTRIBUTOR: LucasFilm

RELEASE DATE: 1998

STRANGE DAYS

THE PLAYERS: Ralph Fiennes, Juliette Lewis, Angela Bassett

THE PLOT: Scripter James Cameron parties like it's 1999 with this millennial-set thriller.

THE DIRECTOR: Kathryn Bigelow

DISTRIBUTOR: 20th Century Fox

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

THE SUN CHASERS

THE PLAYERS: Woody Harrelson

THE PLOT: Harrelson stars as a terminally ill hoodlum who takes his doctor hostage in a search for a cure.

THE DIRECTOR: Michael Cimino

DISTRIBUTOR: Warner Bros.

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

TEARS OF THE SUN

THE PLAYERS: T.B.D.

THE PLOT: The latest Stateside action effort by Hong Kong's carnage king.

THE DIRECTOR: John Woo

DISTRIBUTOR: 20th Century Fox

RELEASE DATE: Summer

T. REX

THE PLAYERS: Whoopi Goldberg

THE PLOT: Goldberg is a cop partnered with a human-sized T. Rex in this prehistorical buddy flick.

THE DIRECTOR: Jonathan Betuel

DISTRIBUTOR: New Line

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

TALES FROM THE HOOD

THE PLAYERS: Corbin Bernson, Clarence Williams III, David Alan Grier

THE PLOT: This action-horror film, exec-produced by director Spike Lee, follows three young hustlers who take a tour of the supernatural underworld.

THE DIRECTOR: Rusty Cundieff

DISTRIBUTOR: 20th Century Fox

RELEASE DATE: May

THE TWELVE MONKEYS

THE PLAYERS: Bruce Willis, Brad Pitt, Madeleine Stowe

THE PLOT: Bruce Willis plays a convict who'll get a reprieve if he can fight off a virus that could wipe out all of humanity.

THE DIRECTOR: Terry Gilliam

DISTRIBUTOR: Universal

RELEASE DATE: T.B.D.

UNDER SIEGE 2: Dark Territory

THE PLAYERS: Steven Seagal, Eric Bogosian

THE PLOT: Bogosian is the villain in this train-jacking sequel.

THE DIRECTOR: Geoff Murphy

DISTRIBUTOR: Warner Bros.

RELEASE DATE: Summer

VIRTUOSITY

THE PLAYERS: Denzel Washington

THE PLOT: Washington stars as a cybercop hunting down a virtual-reality villain. *Lawnmower Man*'s Brett Leonard directs.

THE DIRECTOR: Brett Leonard

DISTRIBUTOR: Paramount

RELEASE DATE: August

WATERWORLD

THE PLAYERS: Kevin Costner, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Dennis Hopper, Tina Majorino

THE PLOT: Kevin Costner sports gills in this post-apocalyptic aquatic actioner.

THE DIRECTOR: Kevin Reynolds

DISTRIBUTOR: Universal

RELEASE DATE: July

WILD BILL

THE PLAYERS: Jeff Bridges, Ellen Barkin, John Hurt

THE PLOT: Action veteran Walter Hill follows up his flop *Geronimo* with another Western, this one about the legendary Wild Bill Hickok.

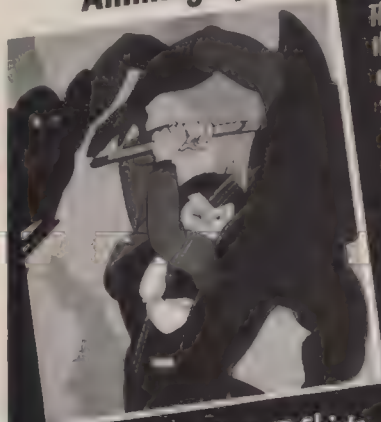
THE DIRECTOR: Walter Hill

DISTRIBUTOR: MGM/UA

RELEASE DATE: April

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A Timely Cop-Out

Jean-Claude Van Damme stumbles into the past

Excedrin Headache Numero Uno for moviegoers is triggered by time travel stories—trying to keep track of what happened when and what impact any given act will have on the big picture. It isn't any easier for Max Walker (Jean-Claude Van Damme), the hero in *TimeCop* (MCA/Universal) who must track timestream raiders and undo their damage.

Peter Hyams' sci-fi pic, set in a future where it is possible to travel back in time, is a standard time-travel adventure, with Walker weighing the ethical questions that arise when he



PAST TENSE: 'The Muscles from Brussels' tracks down historical villains

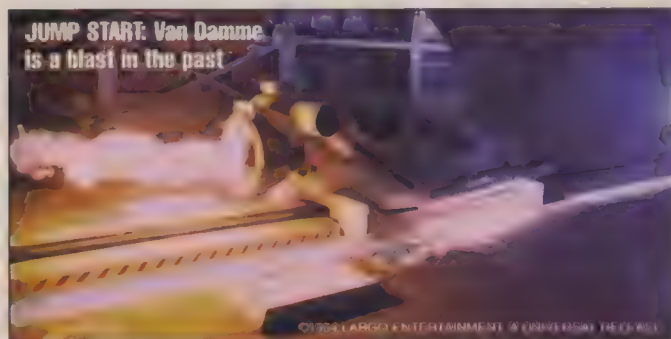
considers skipping back a few years to retrieve his dead wife and stop a corrupt politician (Ron Silver).

The familiar story lurches forward—and backward—at a heady pace to both real and potential events, where Walker

meets historical figures as well as his dead wife. Mia Sara (*Legend*) offers the movie much-needed grace and dignity as Mrs. Walker. But her subplot falls flat as she valiantly emotes against the blank-eyed Van Damme, a first-rate killing machine who is simply incapable of offering the kind of emotional punch necessary here. He's much more comfortable squaring off with the evil Silver, who manages an excellent imitation of Alan Rickman.

The action scenes almost save *TimeCop*. Van Damme's dynamic style, coupled with strong special effects, is still exciting. Yet the movie relies

too much on the action stud's trademark moves (the Van Damme Splits, in particular), and the lame jokes that have become a staple in fight scenes can only work for Arnold or an actor whose native tongue is English. The climax of the film is telegraphed from the very beginning, and it doesn't help to be reminded at every possible moment of the Really Bad Thing that will inevitably happen from all this time travel. The movie, in fact, would probably be much more enjoyable if it were sent back in time—to a distant period at the dawn of cinema when this all seemed fresh and new. —John Benton



JUMP START: Van Damme is a blast in the past

TekWar

(MCA/Universal)

TekWar, the original television movie based on William Shatner's futuristic action-adventure novels, is an ambitious undertaking. It tries to combine the dying technofuture of *Blade Runner* with the good guys vs. drug runners appeal of *Miami Vice*—and it largely succeeds.

In the year 2120, an increasing segment of the citizenry is hooked on a drug known as Tek, a stimulant that lets the user enter into the reality of his or her dreams. But the highly addictive stuff can quickly fry the user's brain. Greg Evigan plays Jake Cardigan, a generally decent guy who was put in suspended animation after being wrongly convicted for dealing Tek and killing a police officer. But he's freed early by the powerful Walter Bascom (William Shatner), who hires Cardigan.

Playing Bascom, head of the Cosmos Detective Agency, must not have been much of a stretch for the canny Shatner (if one reads the assorted memoirs of his *Star Trek* co-stars), since the character really only offers Cardigan a helping hand so he

can further his own megalomaniacal agenda.

The movie's greatest flaw is that it serves as a sort of homecoming for every cliché in the sci-fi and action genres. The most relentless example is the film's antagonist, Sonny. This amalgamation of a dozen or so bad fictional drug runners (from *The King of New York* to any number of TV cop shows) is often on the verge of turning a tense moment into an amusing one. He is bearable as single-shot villain, but repeated use of Sonny in the new syndicated *TekWar* series could send the show to an early grave.

TekWar's characters and story are routine, though still entertaining. Lifting the show above the mundane TV movie-of-the-week are the presence of Evigan and the show's high-quality production values—especially when Cardigan blasts away with his "force gun" or travels on the fantastic futuristic transit system.

Though far from exceptional, the original *TekWar* film is an enjoyable story told with verve and pace. If the series builds on the movie's successes and learns from its mistakes, *Tek* may become as familiar to viewers as *Trek*.—Rob Holly



TEK TREK: Greg Evigan and Eugene Clark

Back of the Rack

THE FUGITIVE

Harry Lime does terrible things—and he knows it. But the criminal life suits him, and his conscience needs no other salve than that. "It's not that awful," he tells his friend Holly Martins. "You know what the fellow said: 'In Italy under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, bloodshed—and they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love, 500 years of democracy and peace. And what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.'"

The 1949 classic *The Third Man* (MCA/Video) is dominated by Harry Lime, even though the character only appears on screen for about 15 minutes. Directed by Carol Reed from a screenplay by Graham Greene, the movie luxuriates in Lime's illicit motives, offering an unforgiving examination of human nature wrapped in a breathless film noir thriller.

The movie, set in Vienna, opens with Martins (Joseph Cotten) learning of the recent death of Harry Lime (Orson Welles). But he recognizes that something is amiss—and after a week of poking around, he finds his old friend dogging him through the city's dark streets. Martins discovers that his undead pal is a criminal who faked his demise to shake off the stubby arm of the law. Lime attempts to recruit his fellow expatriot, but Martins is haunted by images of the black marketeer's vicious deeds and decides to help

the local authorities.

Expertly written and directed, *The Third Man* is a showcase for outsized acting talent. Welles, shambling smugly through knifing shadows and disorienting camera angles, offers a chillingly human study of evil: cocky, self-aware, untouchably shameless. Cotten's contrasting performance complements Welles, balancing the witty darkness of Harry Lime with a Norman Rockwell character of innocent, benign ineptness. Matching the two stars, Trevor Howard is wan and self-assured as the British intelligence officer who is chasing Lime; and the pallid and



TWIST OF LIME: Welles on the run

slack-limbed Alida Valli is devastating as the misguided young woman who loves Lime and has only contempt for Martins' moral rectitude.

The final chase in the gloomy sewers of Vienna, realized chiefly through the sounds of splashing water and the reactions of the performers, is film noir at its best. Peering through the finger holes in a manhole cover, Lime sees his escape in the crowded, sun-washed street above him—but a parked car prevents him from moving the lid. He is trapped, finally and fatally, in the city's—and his own—black soul.

—Douglas Perry

BLUE TIGRESS: Virginia Madsen settles for a B-grade actioner



Blue Tiger

(Columbia TriStar)

The *Godfather* it isn't, but as a Grade B mob-revenge drama, *Blue Tiger* isn't all bad.

The blue tiger of the film's title refers to an elaborate tattoo worn by a member of the Los Angeles branch of the Yakuza, the Japanese equivalent of La Cosa Nostra. Virginia Madsen plays Gina Hayes, a single mother whose son gets caught in the crossfire between the Yakuza and a business owner who's at war with the mobsters. As she holds her dying 5-year-old in her arms, Hayes gets a glimpse of the tattoo of a blue tiger on the masked gunman's chest, and with that clue she sets out to find and kill the assassin.

That minimalist plot is naturally sketched with bare-bones character development, as is the subplot concerning the war between the Yakuza and businessman Henry Soames, whose bus charter company—go figure—the Yakuza wants to control.

In search of her child's killer, Hayes prowls the tattoo parlors of Los Angeles, eventually encountering Smith

(Harry Dean Stanton), a retired skin-art master who fills her in on the meaning of the blue tiger. (It is a symbol of strength, he says, but it is constantly searching for its counterpart, the red tiger. Despite the fact that it is their destiny to come together, when they do, "someone will pay.")

Hayes goes under Smith's needle to acquire a skin-deep

red tiger of her own, and after learning Japanese in what seems like one Berlitz lesson, she also gets a job at a bar frequented by the Yakuza, where she uses her feminine wiles to prowl for blue tigers on the chests of mob members. The bus-company war plot marches along with a maximum of gunfire and guttural dialogue, which is nearly equally split

between English and Japanese. A few scenes of shoot-'em-up mayhem seem to exist solely to prove that getting hit in the chest with an exploding bullet is no picnic.

Eventually Hayes hooks up with the Yakuza member responsible for her son's death, getting to know the guilt-ridden gunman Seiji on quite intimate terms before finding out his true identity. That relationship is actually moderately compelling, with Seiji torn between carrying out his orders to wipe out Hayes and the sense of remorse that prevents him from doing so.

Madsen's diligent, workmanlike performance, as well as that of the laconic Toro Nakamura as Seiji, makes the film watchable, if not memorable. *Blue Tiger* is sort of a fast-food movie—it's not very original or flavorful, but it gets the job done. —Mo Ryan

Color of Night

(Hollywood Pictures)

In *Citizen Kane*, the late publishing giant's aged bookkeeper tells a reporter of a memory that has obsessed him for years, that of a girl in a



ODD COUPLE: *Color of Night*—a.k.a., *Psycho Meets Love Story*



BEDTIME FOR BONZO: Willis
Hanks with his pecker—
and so does March

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white dress whom he glimpsed while on his way to work one morning. "I only saw her for one second, and she didn't see me at all," he says. "But I'll bet a month hasn't gone by since then that I haven't thought of that girl."

One can easily imagine Jane March having such an effect on a man. Sleek and happily corrupted, she barnstormed through moviegoers' senses in 1992's *The Lover*, offering a jolting combination of vulnerability and forceful sexuality. But while she puts her body and emotions on full display once again in *Color of Night*, the movie fails to engage the viewer beyond the level of titillation (the "exclusive-to-video" director's cut offers a few additional flashes of flesh).

The grimly predictable story begins when New York psychologist Bill Capa (Bruce Willis) plays therapy hardball with a patient—who responds by hurling herself out of the window of his high-rise office. Shaken by the suicide, he quits his practice and moves

to Los Angeles to offer his self-pity to college buddy and super-successful counselor Bob Moore (*Lord of Illusions*' Scott Bakula). Moore can't provide much understanding, though, since he quickly catches a knife in the stomach and dies.

Suspecting that the killer is a patient, Capa takes over his friend's practice and begins to look for clues. At the same time, he offers an impressive performance of naked synchronized swimming with a mystery girl (March) who clearly knows a thing or two about the murder.

Perhaps the makers of this movie recognized that the murder/mystery storyline was a bust and so decided to play up the sexual high jinks between Willis and March. And yet nothing about their characters or their actions rings true, and we learn nothing about the kind of obsessive relationship that is presented. The world is just full of kooks, the movie tells us, and psychologists are usually the biggest kooks of all. —Frieda Noone

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Back to the Future

Greg Evigan returns to series TV for a dose of Tek

Greg Evigan is exhausted. The former star of *B.J. and the Bear* and *My Two Dads* is back in the episodic grind with *TekWar*, the

USA cable series based on William Shatner's best-selling novels and the four *TekWar* TV movies that aired last year.

"We really needed this break," says Evigan, who is on a brief hiatus between production of the first 10 episodes and the next eight. "It's been a real burn, but I do think we have been able to maintain good quality. But there's no doubt that you can't quite do what you could do in the two-hour format, though it's something only the people working on the show actually would know. It doesn't come across on film, but in the episodic format you can't tinker around with the scene as much because you don't have the time. You have to find the quickest, best and proven way to get it on film."

Taking place 50 years in the future, *TekWar* features Evigan as former police officer Jake Cardigan, framed for the murder of his partners and placed in cryogenic freeze for a 15-year sentence. He is freed after four years, however, by the influential Walter Bascom (Shatner), who hires Cardigan to work for his Cosmos Detective Agency. After coming to terms with his wife and son—who thought he was guilty—Cardigan sets out



HIGH TEK: Greg Evigan stalks television success

both in person and through cyberspace to combat the various TekLords, dealers in a virtual-reality computer chip that is usually fatal in its addiction.

"Tek actually probes into the points of the brain that control your vision and all your senses, which is different than virtual reality," he says. "Virtual reality is really a machine. You see a picture and it has an effect on your equilibrium, but Tek completely involves you. It's almost like you did super Ecstasy or some such drug. You are going to live that reality as

long as that Tek-set is running. But we're probably on a road to something like that."

Evigan's road began on Broadway, where he appeared in such shows as *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Grease*, which heightened an interest in music that has resulted in one released album and a still-in-progress second. In between he has appeared in a variety of TV movies and the previously mentioned series, both of which he thoroughly enjoyed doing—particularly *My Two Dads* since it afforded him the

opportunity to write as well.

"We were doing this miniseries every week in front of a live audience," he reflects sincerely, "getting real laughs and having a great time." From there he segued into the considerably more dramatic *TekWar* films. "I like mixing it up like that," he says. "It's great because when you go from comedy back to drama, you have a tendency to want to incorporate some of the comedy in what you're doing, which you have to watch out for. And when you go back to comedy,

you want to incorporate some of the drama, which you also have to watch out for. You have to make your choices and pray that they work."

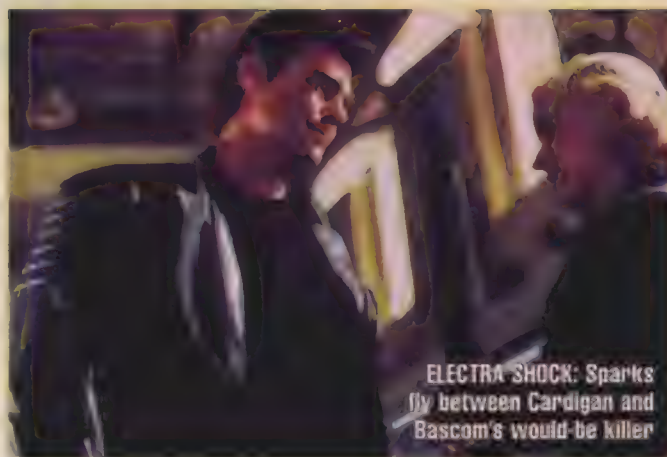
Part of the reason Evigan chose Cardigan's world is that it postulated a future that intrigued the actor.

"My character's values are in the right direction, but he is in a world that, in my opinion, is in a lot of trouble. The society is in trouble. The environment is in trouble. All of those things are happening and it's kind of like what they say about kids now. They see something like 18,000 homicides on TV by the time they are 18 years old—I forget what the number is, but it's something bizarre like that. If you're watching homicides—whether in entertainment or on the news—you can't help but be influenced and a little bit desensitized to those things that you should be more sensitive to. The kids watch the news and say, 'Oh, look at that guy who's dead.' When I was a kid, if I saw

something like that it would just really send chills down my spine. I think in this context—the year 2043—there is a certain amount of desensitization that will take place. Jake can't help it. It's all around him. That's the way I think it's going for me personally, too. Maybe we are going to clear up the ozone problem—maybe we are going to do all those things. I think we're on the right track to it; we're at least starting on our way. But I really don't think we are going to accomplish it anytime soon."

Evigan says that he and Shatner (who serves as executive producer) had discussed the show's vision of the future, and he was surprised to hear that Shatner thought it would be a much better world than it is now. The younger actor didn't agree. "I don't think in two generations we are going to clean it up," he opines.

He certainly saw the irony in happily leaving smog-filled Los Angeles for the fresher air of Toronto, where the series is shot,



ELECTRA SHOCK: Sparks fly between Cardigan and Bascom's would-be killer

only to discover that he couldn't escape environmental problems even in a beautiful setting.

"I was walking around announcing, 'Man, it's beautiful here. The air is fresh,'" he says with a laugh. "Then this guy said, 'Yeah, but make sure you don't stay out in the sun.' 'What do you mean?' 'There is a hole—a complete hole—in the ozone layer that affects the north more.' So, here we are with that problem. No matter where you go, it's always something. But I think *TekWar* represents an interesting future. It's a lot of fun to be able to try and think of what will exist at that time based on what we know now. It gives you something to get excited about while you're working. The year is 2043 and everything is wide open. Who knows what you can do?"

Well, the writers do. With a staff led by former *Star Trek: The Next Generation* producers Hans Beimler and Richard Manning, the show's honchos are attempting to create a hybrid of character drama and action/adventure, though Evigan admits it's a struggle to achieve the former in the "anything can happen" world of weekly television.

Offering an example, the actor says: "There was an episode that had a really interesting idea. It takes place in the room of a character named Carlotta, but Carlotta happens to be something under a VR helmet that's being kept alive somewhere else. She's a virtual-reality sexual toy. In the episode, a friend comes to me and says, 'Jake, I'm in love with this woman. It's too real. There's no virtual reality like

this.' In the original script, Jake was supposed to investigate the situation and he fell in love with Carlotta as well. When the script was rewritten, they took out Jake's relationship with Carlotta. They kept it a little more bland in order to initiate a character that's going to be one of my partners on the show. They didn't want me to actually fall in love with Carlotta to the degree that I did, because it wouldn't be right, maybe, for the relationship with this partner.

"My point," continues Evigan, "is I sat at that table and said, 'I don't think we can have a strong story unless Jake really falls for this woman like his friend did. That's the thrust of it. You've got an hour to get everybody involved in this thing.' They actually inserted some of the original pages back in. That's the constant fight, to try and maintain that my character is not a flat line. I just want to make sure that we don't make him a superhero all the time. He's got to crumble now and then; he's got to fall."

Despite his wishes, Evigan is enough of a realist to recognize that episodic television naturally lends itself to stultifying repetition.

"That's always the threat of doing a series," he admits. "It really does come down to the stories and that's why the stories have to be interesting enough for the actors to have something to play over and over. It's like playing the keyboard. There's really only eight notes, but if you get the right songs, you can change those notes around forever." —Edward Gross



KIRK OUT: Shatner is back as Bascom

TUNED IN!

by Andy Mangels

Welcome back to the best source for news on your favorite genre television shows.

ABC

TV's oddest love triangle heats up even more this month on *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures Of Superman*. Following the return of both Lex Luthor and the Prankster, Lois and Perry's son, Jerry, face "Lucky Leon" (March 5), in an attempt to stop the Man of Steel from becoming part of a terrorist plot to steal nuclear weapons. In "Resurrection" (March 12), a germ-paranoid villain creates a pill that simulates death, which allows him to break the greatest criminal masterminds out of jail. Will he be able to rid the world of germ-infested humans—and Kryptonians?

The final new *Lois & Clark* of the month follows a repeat (March 19). No good superhero series would be complete without a time-travel episode. "Tempus Fugitive" (March 26) finds Lois and Clark travelling back in time to save Superman's life. But wait: Aren't Clark and Superman one and the same? A hint: Lois finds out a big secret before the episode's end!

CBS

Though CBS President of Entertainment Peter Tortorici called for "a new generation of hits," CBS is continuing to completely shut out the genre market in nighttime programming. Of the many projects in development for fall '95, only Francis Ford Coppola's new version of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* even edges close to genre territory. Too bad the network is ignoring such a large segment of the TV audience.

NBC

Tensions mount for the characters of *Earth 2* this month, as Alonzo's dreams begin to drive him crazy, and Bess is forced to establish a food-trading system with the natives in "Natural Born Grendlers" (rescheduled to March 5). The series is preempted on March 12, but returns with a new episode on March 19.

With a lot of added Computer Generated Imaging (CGI) effects on *seaQuest* DSV, genre fans are in for fun on upcoming episodes. The cool, Greek-mythology-oriented "Watergate" (Feb. 19) is followed by a Mark Hamill guest appearance in "Dream Weaver" (Feb. 26). Following that, mind-readers strike in "Alone." Look for Anson Williams (better known as *Happy Days*' Potsie) to direct two more episodes this season, following his crocodile tale on "Meltdown." (Jan. 8.)

FOX

Fox's first genre mid-season replacements is VR (a.k.a. *Avenging Angel*), premiering in the final two weeks of March. Lori Singer is Sydney Bloom, a woman who can escape into a



UP AND AWAY: *Voyager* launches the new Paramount network

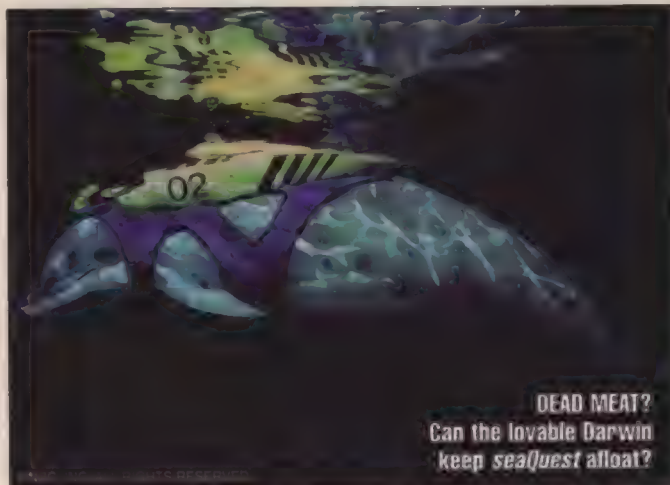
"virtual world" and draw others in with her. When the power becomes dangerous, she calls on the "inventor" of virtual reality, Dr. Frank Morgan (Will Patton), and her eccentric neighbor, Duncan (Michael

Easton), to help her explore the computer frontier. In the pilot, look for comedian-magician Penn Jillette to appear as a bully who learns the error of his ways in the virtual world. Eleven episodes of VR have been produced for this season.

The bugs are back and out to get Miles Hawkins on the upcoming *M.A.N.T.I.S.* episode, "Spider In The Tower" (Feb. 24). After that, only two more episodes are left to be aired of the show, which is unlikely to return in the fall.

SYNDICATED AND CABLE

Rysher's syndicated *RoboCop* will not be returning for duty. The final rerun, "Trouble In Delta City," will air



DEAD MEAT?
Can the lovable Darwin keep *seaQuest* afloat?

on March 6. Then, a year and 22 episodes after it premiered, *RoboCop* will turn in his badge and most likely be turned into scrap metal.

Showtime's upcoming *Outer Limits* series will begin airing all-new episodes on March 26. First up is a two-hour premiere, "Sandkings." Beau Bridges stars as Dr. Simon Kress, a top-level research scientist working on a secret government project involving germination of dormant alien eggs from Mars. When the project is abruptly cancelled and the doctor begins uncontrolled experimentation, Colonel Kress (Lloyd Bridges) intervenes, supported by the doc's wife (Helen Shaver) and son (third generation Dylan Bridges). "Sandkings" is from a George R.R. Martin story, and is scripted by his partner, Melinda Snodgrass.

Coming up on the swash-buckling *Highlander*, look for a run of all-new episodes. MacLeod flees to France for a reunion with an old friend, Hugh Fitzcain (The Who's Roger Daltrey), in "Star-Crossed" (w/o Feb. 27-March 5), followed closely by the vengeful Immortal Kalas. Both MacLeod and Kalas then race to find the oldest Immortal, a man named "Methos" (w/o March 6-12). The rest of March will be all reruns.

Lead actor Kevin Sorbo plus lots of CGI special effects combine to make Universal's *The Legendary Journeys Of Hercules* a fun-filled hit in its own one-hour weekly series. Watch for it on your local syndicated station.

Duckman will also begin all-new episodes of its cranky second season on Saturday, March 11. USA Network promises that there will be tons of guest voices on the series, including some big-name stars.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine will air reruns throughout March, although two new episodes will appear March 27 and April 3.

Star Trek: Voyager zooms through its third month on the United Paramount Network, halting for a preemption on March 6. Look for "Emanations" (March 13) and another new episode (March 20), before a rerun of the second episode, "Parallax" (March 27). If you thought bad alien hairdos were solely the domain of *Babylon 5*, take a look at Neelix (Ethan Phillips). Between his bizarre looks and his girlfriend's (Kes, played by Jennifer Lien) Barbie doll '70s flip, the intergalactic Coifs 'R' Us stylists need help.

Having bounced all over the schedule in its first month, USA's one-hour *TekWar* series might only remain in its Monday night berth for a short while. Rumors of yet another time or day change are in the wind. Coming up, Jake is taken hostage by felons and must face hellish hallucinations in a cryogenic freezer in "Chill Factor." Other upcoming shows include "Deadline" and "Carlotta's Room."

"Stunt Weeks" are nothing new for the Sci-Fi Channel, and this month they've got "Phantom Week" March 20-24, with *Phantom Planet*, *Phantom From Outer Space*, *Phantom Ship*, and two ver-



sions of *Phantom of the Opera* (1925 & 1966). Also on Sci-Fi, look for *Cliffhanger Playhouse* on March 4, airing four final episodes that left viewers hanging forever, including *The Invaders*, *Time Tunnel*, *Dark Shadows* and *Alien Nation*.

On one of my favorite hours, the *Sci-Fi Series Collection*, look for *Future Cop* (March 1-7), *Probe* (March 8-27) and the quirky Wes Craven show, *Nightmare Café* (March 28-April 4). Also look for the

cult hit *She-Wolf Of London* to show up sometime soon.

All-new *Babylon 5* episodes will air through March, but titles were unknown at press time. Story arcs find an increasingly dire tension between the Narns and the Centauri. But will the Minbari, Lumati or Earthforce complicate matters and ignite the sparks of an intergalactic apocalypse? Hmm, now there's a good question.

For all the answers, stay Tuned In! ♦



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Taking Stock

The recent slate of movie books includes some worthy encore performances

The Creature Features Movie Guide Strikes Again

by John Stanley

(Creatures At Large Press, \$20 paperback/\$50 hardcover)

Every day, John Stanley bears witness to alien invasions, lurching swamp creatures and blood-erupting murders. "It has driven me to the abyss of despair," he says, "to the very brink of madness." Which is, of course, his favorite place to be.

Stanley's *The Creature Features Movie Guide Strikes Again* (the fourth updated edition) offers reviews of more than 5,000 science-fiction, action-adventure, fantasy and horror movies, many of which mainstream critics refuse to touch. Here, trashy exploitation films stand arm-in-arm with acclaimed classics—not as their equals or even as worthwhile viewing, but as unique contributions to their genre that deserve a little attention. From Larry Buchanan's comatose *It's Alive* to the outstanding French animated feature *Light Years* (featuring the memorably bare-

breasted Airelle), these reviews are written for hardcore shock-cinema fans. And unlike many movie guides, *Creature Features* doesn't simply provide credit listings with a stilted summary and a yea or nay: The author proves that it is indeed possible to write capsule reviews that are incisive, smart and entertaining.

Stanley, a former *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter, approaches his task with a combination of panache, lighthearted wit and seriousness. Significantly, he has the ability to enjoy the pure schlock value of a movie without dismissing its more subtle thematic aims. Of *Island of the Damned*, for example, he writes: "This Spanish horror thriller is an exciting exploitation film in which a pregnant wife and her husband visit a pleasure island to find all the adults dead and homicidal children eager to slaughter more. On a less obvious level, it points out how children become victims of adult mad-

ness through civil war and strife. Hence, their revenge! Luis Perafiel's script is food for thought and explicitly violent as the children close in on the couple, forcing them to commit acts of mayhem." Such clear, perceptive and unpretentious writing is tough to beat.

John Stanley's *Creature Features Movie Guide*, illustrated with 529 photographs and 24 delightful drawings, includes handy cross references to secondary titles and newly titled rereleases. —Douglas Perry

Five Screenplays

by William Goldman
(Acclaim, \$22.95)

In this engaging collection, screenwriter William Goldman picks up the thread from his 1983 memoir *Adventures in the Screen Trade*. Focusing on his best-known works, which include *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Marathon Man*, *The Princess Bride* and *Misery*, the Academy Award-winner interweaves a writing lesson



with his own idiosyncratic tale of the thrill and tragedy of working in Hollywood.

Goldman began his career as a novelist, pounding out simple, touching stories about awkward adolescence, disintegrating marriages and assorted crises of confidence (his best work is probably 1967's *The Thing of It Is*). But when he came to Hollywood, Goldman abandoned these traumatic personal elegies. People go to the movies, he reasoned, to see action and verve. And so he set out to prove, time and again, that he is among the best writers in the industry at creating throat-constricting tension: At their best, his movies build anxiety in waves, one breathless moment on top of another until the protagonist somehow emerges victorious or dies in a hail of bullets. To maintain his thesis, Goldman downplays the importance of character development in movies, insisting that it is secondary to pace and story. Yet one senses that his heart isn't in the argument. And indeed, his own fully realized characters prove him wrong, as they come alive on the page as they do on the big screen.

The screenplay form, of course, is not designed for retail book sales. It's a blueprint for movie directors, a malleable guide to the creation of brightly lit images moving through artificial time. But Goldman's energy and wit cannot be hidden in the constricting format, resulting in a collection of scripts that can be enjoyed by both die-hard movie buffs and the casual reader. — Douglas Perrin

The Making of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine

by Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens

(Pocket Books, \$16)

Despite innumerable best-selling novels inspired by the various *Trek* series, nonfiction books about the franchise have been pretty much limited to episode guides to the original series and *The Next Generation*. Things are suddenly changing, however, and one of the most recent entries is also one of the most impressive.

Although *Deep Space Nine* doesn't seem to be getting the respect that it deserves, it is paid proper homage in the pages of



SPIT AND RINSE: Lawrence Olivier tortures Dustin Hoffman in *Marathon Man*

The Making of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine. Written by Judith and Garfield Reeves-Stevens, this tome is quite obviously influenced by Stephen Whitfield's classic *The Making of Star Trek*, taking the reader step by step deep into the process of bringing a weekly television series to life.

The book begins with a cursory history of *Trek*, from Gene Roddenberry's creation of the original series through *The Next Generation*. Then, beginning on page 37 and continuing for the next 300 pages or so, the subject is solely DS9, moving through every phase of production—from casting of the series regulars to Herman Zimmerman's designs for the station.

Along the way we are brought into the room at the moment of conception, where we learn that it was actually former Paramount chieftain Brandon Tartikoff who got the ball rolling on a second *Star Trek* spin-off. "Drawing on Gene Roddenberry's succinct description of the original *Star Trek* series as 'Wagon Train to the stars,'" the authors write. "Tartikoff originally suggested that the new *Star Trek* series might be 'The Rifleman in space'—with Sisko as the Chuck Connors character with his son, who perhaps is a stow-away. Tartikoff said: 'I pitched that idea to Berman and he said he'd think about it. And then, right after that, Gene Roddenberry passed away and his widow, Majel [Barrett Roddenberry], was very open to the idea of having this deal hap-

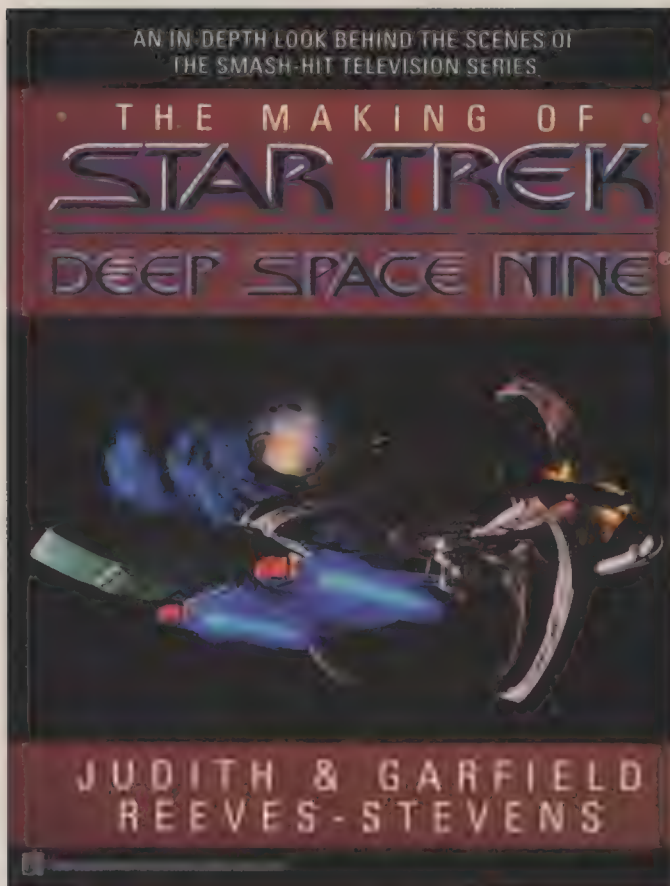
pen and happen quickly. I suppose that somewhere in that idea, *Deep Space Nine* has its roots, though obviously it became its own thing."

After this revelation, we make the transition with the producers from original concept through production, and witness the various interesting happenings along the way. Major Kira Nerys (Nana Visitor), for example, was not originally a character. Instead—as revealed in the original story treatment, which is reprinted here—the Bajoran officer was *Next Generation*'s Ro Laren (Michelle Forbes), so the character was completely different. When Forbes wouldn't commit to a series, Kira was born and in turn inspired a variety of new situations and relationships on the station.

One of the book's main faults is the episode guide to the first two seasons, which is of an extremely cursory nature. It would have been interesting to get the points of view of the cast and crew as to what went into the making of each episode.

The entire package is enhanced by numerous illustrations. Beyond never-before-printed, behind-the-scenes photographs, there are a variety of production designs that highlight everything from weapons to ships to aliens. Added to this are 16 pages of full color photos.

If *The Making of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* is an indication of nonfiction to come from Pocket, it seems as though the *Trek* print franchise is in good hands. — Edward Gross



Hell in a Handbasket

The tender story of a boy, a girl and the demons who rend them



In an effort to give computer games that big-screen feel, game creators are tracking down not-too-expensive actors (read: second-string players or stars in decline) and putting them into their games. Take 2

Interactive, however, topped just about everyone in the industry by attracting one of the biggies in the movie biz: Dennis Hopper.

Coming along with Hopper are Stephanie Seymour, super-model extraordinaire; Jeffrey Holder, he of the great voice and even better laugh; and, as the

Take 2 Interactive folks put it, "The exotic Grace Jones."

The plot of the game is an interesting one. In the near future, Washington, D.C., is taken over by extreme right-wingers, led by political dominatrix Solene Solux, who has the impressive title of Emperor. D.C. is made the primary nexus between this world and the next, a literal Hell where Solux's criminals/sinners are sent. The Emperor (played by Jones) accuses and convicts—and barbed demons stalk the streets to carry their new charges to their fiery home.

Among the things now branded criminal is computer technology, including the exploration of cyberspace. Health enhancements, robotics and technological entertainment advancements are also forbidden, something that might give the average gamer a moment's pause.

Not all these items on Solux's list of sins have come from the top. The populace begged for such reform when the extremely popular interactive Acti-Deck virtual-reality, home-entertainment system was found to alter the genetic code in its users, creating a strain of

humans with frightening psionic capabilities.

But Solux used this mandate from the people to pass broad laws, eventually restricting or eliminating virtually all free speech, rival political parties, drugs and alcohol, gambling, books and dozens of other "dangerous" items. Not surprisingly, resistance to these changes grew, but with horned creatures striking down offenders and hauling them off to Hell, resistance is rarely active. Some people have returned from the depths; those still able to talk paint visions of the pain and horror that sinning

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EVIL COMES WHEN YOU CALL HIS NAME

CANDYMAN

FAREWELL TO THE FLESH

PROPAGANDA FILMS ENTERTAINMENT PRESENTS A PROPAGANDA FILMS PRODUCTION A BILL CONDON FILM "CANDYMAN: FAREWELL TO THE FLESH" TONY TODD KELLY ROWLAND AND TIMOTHY CAGNANT AS PAUL MCNEELY
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PolyGram Gramercy

THE CANDYMAN RETURNS ON MARCH 17TH

earns. Underground rebel cells have formed, but their agenda seems hopeless, and their numbers are few.

The gamer plays as the tandem of Rachel Braque and Gideon Eshanti, a young pair working for Solux as agents seeking to stamp out the menace and danger of computer technology everywhere. They were happy in their work, rooting out the evil of cyberspace wherever it reared its head, but at the time of the game's beginning, they are no longer sure. Their current indecision about working for Solux comes as a result of the evening's just-concluded events. A government scrub team broke down the door to their apartment and attempted to eliminate them both. Now Gideon and Rachel are on the run from the law, clad in nothing but their underwear. This rude awakening in both the figurative and literal sense is where the player comes in.

The pair run to the house of a friend, where the actual game begins. Rachel and Gideon must discover who is behind the bungled hit and why it happened. As they flit between the nether regions of Hell and Washington, D.C., they must also continually stay one step ahead of the Hand of God scrub team that failed in its assassination attempt.

Enroute to their discovery of what's behind their flight and the truth of Emperor Solux's reign of terror, Gideon and Rachel will run into an impressive cast of characters, not the least of whom is Mr. Beautiful, played by Hopper. Beautiful is a scheming demon, always looking for a leg up on the competition, and he feels this pair of hunted humans might just be the ticket.

Game play in Hell is simple. Much of the game revolves around conversations with other characters. Clicking with the mouse around one of these characters will generally launch a conversation. At the end of this chat, all rendered in somewhat chunky, although attractive graphics, the player generally has a chance to ask a few more specific questions.

And herein lies the problem

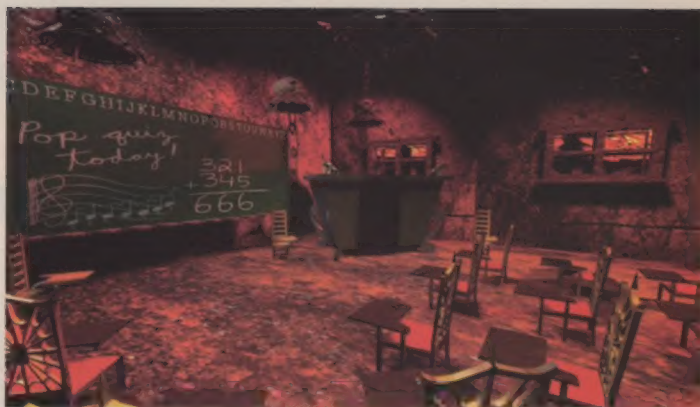
with Hell as a game. The Siliwood phenomenon has existed for the most part in the newly formed "Interactive Movie" genre of games where the player watches a clip of video (or in this case computer-generated graphics) and then makes a "choose-your-own-adventure" style decision at the end, often launching the player into even more conversation.

Most of these games have been critical failures and with good reason: They aren't games. This definition of "interactivity" as simply button-pressing is a new one, and most dedicated gamers aren't buying it. But the great unwashed in the gaming crowd have kept hopes up for two games, Hell and Wing Commander III. WCIII has been touted with big stars (Malcolm McDowell, John Rhys-Davies and Mark Hamill) and has a dedicated following. It is a lovely game, beautifully acted and scripted, wonderfully directed. The clips are short, advance the plot and are interesting to watch.

Hell has Hopper. While that might be enough to drive some game sales, it won't do much. Even the Hopper that Take 2 got isn't the Hopper you'd expect. He is strangely subdued, not the maniacal, screaming demon you want him to be.

But that's not the real trouble here. The real trouble is that the writers of Hell were apparently in love with the fact that they attracted Hopper and other stars to the project. Dialogue strings run for five minutes and more, sometimes hitting 10 minutes. These are conversations that are completely non-interactive and that cannot be skipped. When Hopper speaks, the player has to listen or miss valuable information.

Gamers don't buy games to watch a 10-minute film clip, but that is what Hell gives them. Admittedly, the story is an interesting one, but Hell is not an interesting game. Because the writers and designers weren't able to leap past the limitations of the genre, Hell ends up confined by the genre, and a game that should have been a trendsetter becomes simply part of the trend. —Steve Honeywell



Here you'll face the demonic equivalent of a geography test



While Mr. Beautiful's voice is supplied by Hopper, his face is not



Gideon and Rachel will need to travel to seedy locations to find clues



Ah, Hell. The warmth, the decor, the heartwarming torture devices...

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